

**STORY  
OF A  
LUTHERAN  
PEOPLE**

*Strum, Wisconsin*

**1872**

**1972**



# STORY OF A LUTHERAN PEOPLE

Story Written By  
Roy Matson

Auxiliary Story By  
Mrs. Viola Gunderson

Stenographic Layout By  
Mrs. Jean Amundson



SCHEDULE FOR CENTENNIAL YEAR, 1972

STRUM LUTHERAN CHURCH

CENTENNIAL FESTIVAL SUNDAY

JUNE 25, 1972

Mondovi Conference Lay School of Theology

January 11, 18, 25, February 1, 8

CONFIRMATION REUNION

Classes of 1925-34 - Saturday, April 8  
Classes of 1935-48 - Saturday, April 29  
Classes of 1949-61 - Saturday, May 20  
Classes up to 1924 - Saturday, June 24  
Classes of 1962-72 - Saturday, October 25

Dedication of Remodeled Church to be announced

A Teaching Week on Marriage and Family Life, September 17-20

Centennial Day Services - December 3      Actual Anniversary Date - December 2

The Centennial Committee

Norman Amundson	Roy Matson
Gerald Bergerson	Mrs. Luther Monson
Roger Brian	Rev. Luther Monson
Mrs. Rufus Gunderson	Mrs. Ernest Severson
Robert Hatcher, Chr.	Mrs. Bertha Strand
Mrs. Mabel Hulberg	Mrs. Inez Swendby
Mrs. Arvid Koxlien	



PSALM 46

*God is for us a refuge and strength,  
A helper close at hand in time of distress:  
So we shall not fear tho' the earth should rock,  
Tho' the mountains fall into the depths of the sea,  
Even tho' its waters rage and foam,  
Even tho' its mountains be shaken by its waves.*

*The waters of a river give joy to God's city,  
The holy place where the Most High dwells.  
God is within, it cannot be shaken;  
God will help it at the dawning of the day.  
Nations are in tumult, the kingdoms are shaken:  
He lifts his voice, the earth shrinks away.*

*The Lord of Hosts is with us;  
The God of Jacob is our stronghold.*

*Come, consider the works of the Lord—  
The deeds He has done on the earth.  
He puts an end to wars over all the earth  
The bow He breaks, the spear He snaps.  
He burns the shields with fire.  
Be still and know that I am God;  
Supreme among the nations,  
Supreme on the earth!*

*The Lord of Hosts is with us;  
The God of Jacob is our stronghold.*



## DEDICATION

This History is prepared and our Centennial observed to the Glory of the Triune God. It is dedicated to future generations who will build their lives in Christ upon the work of the faithful in past and present generations.

"That which we have seen and hear we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete."

1 John 1:3,4

## A DEDICATORY PRAYER

Gracious God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, receive our thanks for every faithful son and daughter of this congregation who has labored to keep the light of the Gospel shining brightly among us.

Grant that by faithfulness in our generation the fruits of faith may abound.

Renew us by your word and spirit for the work you have called us to do. Keep us always in the comfort and the discipline, the healing and hope of the Gospel.

In the name of Christ,

Amen



## A CREED FOR THE SEVENTIES

By Dr. Alvin Rogness

### *CREDO*

#### *I BELIEVE*

that the Gospel itself is the most relevant thing in the world—the exhilarating and terrifying news that we are sons of God and heirs of an eternal Kingdom, not because we deserve to be sons or that we behave like sons, but because through the favor of God alone in Jesus Christ we are given the status of sons.

#### *I BELIEVE*

that to accept this good news and this commission is the most relevant thing in the world, because such faith simultaneously attaches me to God and plunges me into a life of service to the world.

#### *I BELIEVE*

that the Christian congregation is the laboratory where the Holy Spirit, through Word and Sacrament, summons people to become grateful and responsible disciples of Christ, grooms and renews them as sons of God, prepares and empowers them for selfless service to their brothers and thrusts them into the world for the work of reconciliation in all areas of life.

#### *I BELIEVE*

that the Church can be fully and decisively active in and for the world only as it first ministers the miracle of this faith to itself. No man can save a drowning man unless he himself first can swim.

#### *I BELIEVE*

that I, as a member of Christ's Church, am under the dual obligation to open my heart to the disciplines of worship, prayer and fellowship within the Church on the one hand and to open my heart to the cries of a troubled and suffering world on the other hand.

#### *I BELIEVE*

that if my fellow believers and I together will pursue the inner disciplines of the Spirit, and at the same time dedicate our minds and wills to understand the hurts of our age and to be the Lord's agents of healing—I believe that God may use me and the Church with unsuspecting and unpredictable power for the world's rehabilitation and renewal.



CENTENNIAL MESSAGE  
FROM  
PASTOR MONSON

*Dr. Gerhard Frost, a former teacher, once observed that man is the only one who writes history. There are no histories by the bear, the beetle, or the bald eagle. The lower forms of life have instinct and memory of a kind, but no history. They are born, live, and die in their little place without any consciousness of what has gone before or little thought for what will come after them. Man alone writes history.*

*As a Christian Church we believe that the central fact of our history and of the history of every man is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Because of this event we persist in hope, no matter how rough the past may have been or how grim and unpromising the present may be. Because of Christ's resurrection a radical new possibility has entered into human life. The future is not closed. It stands open, full of possibilities for renewal and healing.*

*We persist in hope, then, not because we have such confidence in human goodness and wisdom. We are not looking to technology or to the social and political structures that men create, as important as these may be. Our hope is in the Word of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

*The future is open because in the resurrection a power for transformation has been released for our use in the world. The possibility for radical, fundamental change is always present. The Holy Spirit is mediating this power through the Word and the Sacraments and is working to change us, to change men and through them to change the institutions, societies, and nations that men create.*

*Because the Christ of history has defeated death we dare to believe that God is the Lord of History and that we are never defeated; not by sin or failure, not by the disappointments and broken promises that so characterize the life of man. We are not defeated by death itself, for in all these things we, through faith, are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. (Romans 8:37)*

*This gives us reason to work, to keep going despite disappointments because we believe in an open future. We are not trapped by the mistakes, the sins, the short-sightedness, the disobedience of the past, ours or anyone else's. Christ is risen. There IS something new under the sun. There is a radical and transforming power that has been released for our use in the world. That power is in the Gospel which the Lord of the church has entrusted to us. Let us use it that there might be love and joy, peace, patience, healing, the forgiveness of sins and all the other great things that our Lord intends should bless man as we await His coming again.*

*We don't know what the judgment of history will be upon this generation, but may our prayer be that God's people may always persevere in hope, sustained by the Word of Christ's resurrection.*

Luther D. Monson



*Dear Friends:*

*Congratulations as you observe 100 years of living in relationship to our Lord Jesus Christ as children and servants at Strum Lutheran Church!*

*It is good to look back and recount the blessings of our Lord upon His people. We discover, as we do so, how faithful our Lord has been to His promises, that He will not leave us nor forsake us.*

*Thus the past becomes a meaningful encouragement for the present. The same Lord Who strengthened our predecessors to perform a creative ministry in and through Strum Lutheran Congregation is still at work to assist us to do the same. The same Lord Who promised, "I will build my Church" is at work among us to help us be an effective part of the Body of Christ in our generation.*

*Congratulations and God's blessing as you continue to seek to fulfill your ministry through Jesus Christ, our Lord.*

*Sincerely yours,*

*Theo. A. Ohlrogge, President  
Northern Wisconsin District  
The American Lutheran Church*



*Dear Friends in Christ,*

*On the occasion of the Centennial of Strum Lutheran Church, Mrs. Preus and I wish to extend our sincere congratulations to the congregation, and we pray God will continue to bless and prosper your work under the guidance of Pastor Monson and Christian pastors who may follow him.*

*I thank God for the privilege of serving you and dispensing the Bread of Life among you. May our Heavenly Father grant you a fruitful "Carrying out" of His great commission in the years that lie ahead. This we ask in Jesus' Name.*

*Sincerely in Christ,*

*Rev. J. H. Preus  
The First Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Mount Vernon, Washington*

*Dear Friends,*

*As I write these words on behalf of my late father and myself it is with a sense of gratitude to God and to the people of Strum Lutheran Church for the many years of fellowship in the Gospel we enjoyed with you. The Gospel of Jesus Christ continues to be the power of God for salvation to all those who believe. As you begin your second 100 years may the Gospel of Jesus Christ continue to be proclaimed that men may know the love, the peace, and the joy there is in Christ.*

*Sincerely in Christ,*

*Rev. Alf W. Hjemboe  
First Lutheran Church  
Barron, Wisconsin*



TO THE MEMBERS OF THE STRUM LUTHERAN CHURCH  
Grace and Peace

Friends:

To observe the 100th Anniversary of the Church is to remember with gratitude, the devotion that prompted it's founding and organization. We need to be mindful of the heritage which is ours by virtue of the unfailing loyalty which our forefathers held toward the Means of Grace, the Word and the Sacraments.

The Church, being faithful to its task, has built upon only one foundation, which is Jesus Christ. (I Cor. 3:11) His presence has blessed the efforts that have been extended. As Ernest F. Scott has said, "The Church may have seen its duty imperfectly, for it is made up of fallible things, but when all is said it has been the ONE POWER through nearly two thousand years which has stood for peace, for brotherhood, and for the cause of the poor and distressed."

We pray that as we labor to advance His Kingdom, that the Holy Spirit will guide our every decision. We rejoice with you that God has permitted you to come to this time when you can celebrate the Centennial.

Sincerely,

Rev. Norman A. Berntson  
Holmen-Halfway Creek Lutheran Parish  
Holmen, Wisconsin



*Dear Friends,*

*Two important thoughts come to me as I greet you on this occasion. First, I think of those who have died in the faith, who are now with Christ. What a reward these people have won by their faith! They have received what God promised. They have entered into the joy of their Lord. They now know the fruits of love, of faith and hope. We bless God for their memory. Secondly, as for us, we have a large crowd of witnesses around us--the blessed dead. Therefore, let us rid ourselves of anything that displeases God. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. Let us be faithful to the responsibilities that belong to the household of God.*

*As a former pastor I have always regarded Strum as one of the happiest experiences of my 25 years of ministry, remembering with joy, people and situations and giving thanks to God for the privilege of those years. Our family sends warmest greetings to the congregation and pastor and remembers you all in prayers as you seek to please our Lord Jesus Christ.*

*Sincerely,*

*Rev. Arthur Grimstad  
Concordia College  
Moorhead, Minnesota*



*Dear Friends,*

*I congratulate you as a congregation on your service to the Lord over these past 100 years of grace. I am sure that on this Anniversary your hearts rejoice in the privilege that has been yours to share the Good News of Salvation through the preaching and teaching ministry of the Word and Sacraments. I also count it a privilege to have been a part of that service in Strum. While you rejoice in past accomplishments, may this Anniversary be even more meaningful to you as a challenge to pray with expectation for greater opportunities to do great things for the Lord in Strum.*

*Mrs. Olson joins me in wishing God's Benediction and Blessing on you in your 100th year of ministry.*

*Your humble servant in Christ,*

*Rev. Arthur M. Olson  
Our Saviour's Lutheran Church  
Patterson, California*



*Dear Friends in Christ:*

*The Apostle Paul beautifully expresses my feelings toward the congregation in Strum when he writes in Philippians, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making my prayer with joy, thankful for your partnership in the Gospel from the first day until now."*

*I would also add his words in the letter to the Ephesians: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places."*

*To those words I can only add my own sincere thanks for the opportunity and privilege of the years of fellowship, service, and love that were ours in your midst. May God continue to bless and use you.*

*Sincerely,*

*Rev. Axel T. Blom  
Our Saviour's Lutheran Church  
Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin*

*Dear Friends in Christ:*

*One of our favorite hymns has the phrase:*

*"Time, like an ever-rolling stream,  
Bears all its sons away;  
They fly, forgotten as a dream  
Dies at the opening day."*

*In some ways this is true, but in other ways it is not. On the occasion of the Centennial Anniversary of the Lutheran community in Strum, memories abound. The past and the present merge into one, and "sons" who have gone on before are still with you in spirit. You are indeed surrounded by "a cloud of witnesses."*

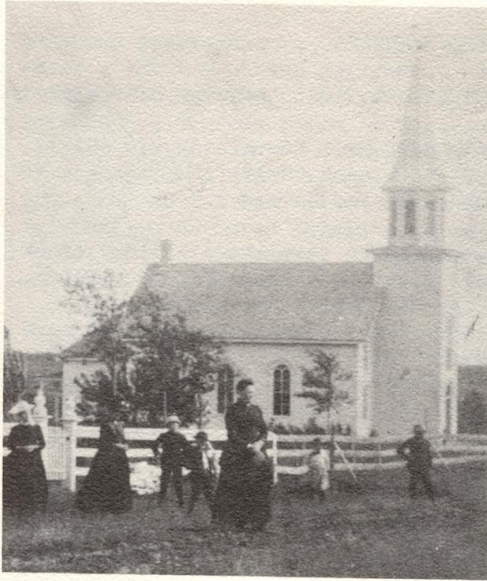
*May God in His mercy and wisdom continue to guide and bless you in the future, as He has in the past.*

*Sincerely in Christ,*

*Rev. Harvey M. Berg  
Lutheran Social Services  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin*



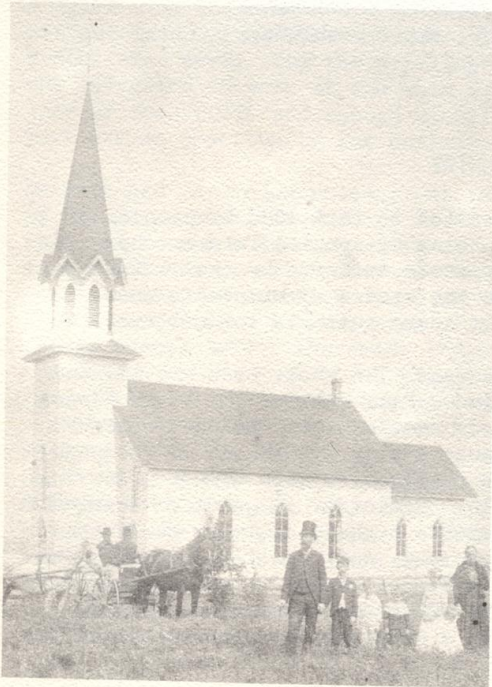
OUR CHURCH HOMES



*First St. Pauls Church, erected in 1877 with C. J. Helsen family.*



*The rebuilt St. Pauls Church of 1902*



*First West Beef River Church, erected in 1887 with H. E. Heyer family.*



*The West Beef River Church, erected in 1915.*



## A STORY OF A LUTHERAN PEOPLE

The opening paragraph of the constitution of our first Lutheran Church reads:

"In Jesus Name: According to God's Word in 1 Corinthians 14:40 and Colossians 2:5, Paul writes that in each Christian congregation everything must be done decently and in order."

It is with that same purpose that we now undertake to write a history of the Lutheran Church in our community, that all might know the roots from which they have come and the way in which God, by His Grace, has preserved His witness in this community. Things have not always been so decent; nor have they always been done in good order over the years; but God, out of it all, has wonderfully preserved the Gospel for our generation. It is out of gratitude for this that we now observe 100 years of Lutheranism in Strum. May God bless our efforts.

Church and community development came almost simultaneously to our area and as the progress of both was of interest to all, much of this story will have material not exactly relative to the main topic. All, however, had some effect on furthering and sustaining the faith among our forebearers. For these reasons and some of lesser significance, the telling will follow this outline:

1. Norway, state church, tenant laws, the emigration;
2. The first Norwegians, their home areas;
3. Our area, appearance, laws governing settlements;
4. The various synods, the clergy, their problems;
5. A chronological study.

and so we begin.

### THE OLD COUNTRY

Much has been written of the mass immigration to this land by peoples of northern Europe, the exodus from Norway being of special interest here. But this was not the only depopulating episode suffered by the little country, hardly much larger in area than the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin, with barely 30 percent of that space suitable for cultivation.

In 1349 a ship from England docked at Bergen. The whole crew was ill and before the cargo was unloaded all had died. Rats carried the Black Plague to land. Only a few northern and sparsely settled areas escaped contact with the deadly disease, which carried away nearly two-thirds of the population before its course had run. Whole settlements were denuded, leaving many parts of the country empty of people. Officials in government service and the clergy were among the most vulnerable because of their daily contacts with the ill. Of five bishops in Norway, only one lived through the epidemic; 70 funerals were conducted in a Bergen church in one day. Norwegian historians refer to this period as "Ødetiden" (deserted or empty times). At least 300 years passed before a semblance of rehabilitation had taken place.



Absentee government in Denmark ruled Norway during most of those "empty" years. Their king and government were favorable to Martin Luther's Reformation, adopted the Lutheran religion in their state church, and began introducing the new faith to their northern neighbors in 1537. Reception was not always smooth. Catholic bishops were removed, some forcibly, to be replaced by lesser experienced Lutherans. The scarcity of qualified men extended the transition over several years. In many instances pre-reformation fixtures remain in Norwegian church buildings to this day. Hurdal and Tolgen houses of worship, to which many local first settlers belonged, are typical.

The clergy prospered under absentee rule. As the only educated class, they were pressed into service in many matters concerning the state, and in certain cases became emissaries of the king. They could commandeer transportation on such business and were collectors of certain taxes. Their position in the state church gave them authority to force attendance if they wished. Members could be grilled at a regular service regarding a wrongdoing, with a full attendance listening, and labor service on the parish "gaard" (farm) was mandatory at the pastors command. The Hurdal "bygdebok" (community book) tells of one man serving the pastor 139 days per year. Another told of flailing grain all day with stops only to light his pipe. Not all the clergy were autocratic, but actions of a few reflected on all. By 1800 pastors had been relieved of most secular duties.

The Black Plague had erased nearly all semblance of land ownership throughout the country. Very few landowners remained and during the early 1600's a grant from the king would establish a new chain of land title. A man without land became "husman" (small tenant) and in time was reduced to status of a serf. For the privilege of living in a small house, the latter was obligated to work at the whim of his landlord. Pay was a meager allowance of foodstuffs and enough clothing to preserve life in many instances. Rare was an opportunity for betterment of their lot.

Denmark had favored Napoleon. At the Congress of Vienna the great powers of Europe responsible for his first defeat separated Norway from the Danish rule and formed a Swedish alliance. The Norwegians wrangled a separation from the Swedes in 1814, formed their own government, and adopted a liberal constitution. A favorite young Dane was appointed King and the country was highly satisfied. A succession of rulers finally brought King Oscar to the throne around 1850. The great industrial revolution in Europe had made its impression on the Norse, the king instituted reform, much of it benefitting the working classes. The "husman" now received pay, up to 8 shillings for a working day, plus special provisions for a cow or a sheep if he had one. No longer did his wife work a long day in the landlords house for a half-dozen "boksebøtter" (pants patches), and a written contract spelled details. A settlement date was set, usually Christmas eve. King Oscar was a popular king, but the change was late. Rumors of free land in a far off country was learned to be true. Men were returning successful men, confirming the unbelievable.



## EMIGRATION AND EMIGRANTS

"Free Land" were magic words throughout the rural areas of northern Europe. It was the topic of nearly all conversation, among rich and poor alike, during the mid-part of the nineteenth century. To the struggling Norwegian "husman", ownership of a few mals of land seemed outright old-age security, and here were rumors of a country where 700 mals (1 acre = 4.4 mal) were to be had for merely living thereon.

The land owner had an attentive ear, too. Succeeding generations of large families had reduced inherited holdings until some were hardly better off than husmen. If these rumors were only true here was an opportunity to sell and begin again.

Letters from abroad and a few returned promoters confirmed what had seemed idle talk. There were also eloquent words regarding opportunities for the work of timbermen in the great pineries of northern Wisconsin, where trees grew so thickly that a days walk could be made without seeing the sun. But with the rosy picture were words of warning; the new land was no place for the lazy or weak, wages were truly good but work was hard.

Stories, and there were many, of wild blood-thirsty Indians impressed only the hesitant. Prospects of a long sea voyage, a strange language, and new customs were cause of hardly a passing thought. How to get there quickly became the first and only goal.

Tickets cost the emigrant the equivalent of about \$30 on those slow sail-ships, food was not included. The latter was the responsibility of the passenger, and when a predicted 8-week crossing stretched into 10 or 12 weeks, the matter of staying alive took some real self-discipline. Experiences of these first newcomers could on occasion be eye-lifting. But free land was worth hardships. And come they did in an ever-increasing stream. A Norwegian laypreacher, Elling Eilson, later ordained by the German clergy and founder of the Lutheran Free Church, arrived in 1839. Nearly 1,000 countrymen had preceded him at that early date. By 1850 an estimated 18,000 had landed, and three times that figure by 1860. Immigration records show around 124,000 arrived in the next 10 years, and over 174,000 came in the period 1870-90. This was the high point of this unusual mass movement. Included in these figures are the people that landed at Quebec and later entered the U.S. at Chicago and other lake ports.

Norway lies far north, part of it above the arctic circle, its latitude compares with that of extreme northern Canada. For this reason a cold climate would be expected, but the warm gulf stream crosses the Atlantic and the accompanying winds sweep far inland, giving the country a fairly stable, temperature weather condition. A low mountainous coastline with deep fjords has become an often-repeated description of the old country.

People settling in our area came from farther inland, most did a little agricultural work and timber harvest occupied time during the long winters. Many settlements in Norway were isolated by steep mountain ridges, and, until modern transportation and communication became common, had developed dialects much different from their nearby communities. Such was not the



case with local emigrants who lived in fairly populace areas with considerable movement of people.

Many customs were different in this old world. One of the most peculiar was a matter of names, and which should have comment. Through past centuries it has been common practice for the Norwegian to have a surname composed of the father's first name with 'son' added thereto. For instance, John, son of Ole, would be known as John Olson; likewise Mary, daughter of Ole, was Mary Olesdatter. A visit to either of the local cemeteries will reveal markers with the above inscription. Continuing, John's son Ole would become Ole Johnson. Also common and increasing the tangle was the habit of some families' use of the same first names through many generations.

Many immigrants on entering the USA chose as surname that of the "gaard" where they were last employed or lived. For instance: Westegaard, Indgjer, Klavestad, Thomasgaard, Rognlien. This practice has been largely discontinued in Norway, possibly because of the confusion it created.

There was also a great deal of shortening of lengthy old country names because of pronunciation and spelling difficulties. This was understandable; much of this occurred at the time citizenship was granted and these new settlers were not slow about their allegiance to the USA.

Oslo, the capital city, is located in south-central Norway with a narrow strait leading out to sea. About 50 English miles north is a large inland lake called Mjøsa. Just back from its west shores a few miles is the valley of Hurdal, a bygd of 2300 to 2500 people, one area we will consider. Between Mjøsa and the Swedish border to the east, is a long valley called Østerdal (meaning east valley). It forms far north of the 60th parallel in the rough highlands and ends south-east of the capital city.

From each of these two areas of the old country over 30 men, women, and their children crossed the ocean, traveled a long cross-country trip to reach the place we now live. Esten Johnson Dahl of Østerdal was the first Norwegian to settle here, was influential in turning others this way, and for that reason alone his home "bygd" (community) bears a well-deserved look.

#### TOLGA

About three-fourths of the way up this long east valley, at an elevation of about 2,000 feet above sea level, lies the village of Tolga. With its rather high altitude, a latitude comparable to Anchorage, Alaska, and being inland, it is a cold place. Their "bygd" (community) book, published in 1908, has some interesting information. Snow may come in early October and stay until late May. No corn or small grain can be harvested, therefore no chickens or eggs are produced. Potato raising is a gamble, many times they are left in the ground. Prior to rail service, which came about 1875, cattle were too valuable for butchering, and meat on the table came from the state woods or the Clamma River. Grasses were dried for cattle feed, but some years boiled leaves alone brought the cows through the latter part of the winter. A copper smelter began operation in Tolga about 1670. Many men had employment but the work was dirty, disagreeable, and very



unhealthy. Two hundred years later the operation closed and it was about that time emigration began from Tolga.

Usual correspondence evidently took place between Esten Johnson Dahl and the home community. Although he and his wife left Tolga about 1860, they had lived in LaCrosse county until coming here 8 years later. A short 2 years had barely passed when three more "Tollings", Ole Thomasgaard, Lars J. Dahl, and Nels Kleven arrived. All were single men at that time. Although immigrants from Tolga came over the space of several years, perhaps the names of all should be mentioned at this time. The five above were shortly joined by Erik Erlien and wife, Mikkel Ry and wife, Mrs. Knut Kleven, Esten Enebak and wife, Svend Holden and wife, John and Thore Holden, Bernt Moe and wife, Ole, Lars, and Sever Moe, Ole P. Berg and wife, Ole K. Berg and wife, Knut Hammer and wife, Erik Holden and wife, Malene Rønning, Mrs. Albert Larson and Mrs. Hans Peterson Stai. With the early arrivals came two single young ladies, who later married Ole Thomasgaard and Nels Kleven. Names of these people will be found in our earliest church records. Several of these men became active in local government on gaining citizenship and descendants of this large contingent from Østerdal may be met on our street every day.

#### HURDAL

Another area to contribute a large number of people to our congregation was Hurdal. Farther southwest and closer to the sea, it was warmer than Tolga. High timbered hills on three sides and a lake and lowland on the east formed its boundaries to include about three of our square townships. Timbering, light agriculture and a glass works furnish livelihood for about 2,300 inhabitants in 1850. Population was hardly more 100 years later due to a most intense emigration.

The plague had left Hurdal empty of people. Markers, rocks, and evidences of old burial grounds are set apart, and historians agree the area was uninhabited following the epidemic of 1349-50. Later records show that some Finns occupied the highlands around 1650 with a few securing title to lands. As Norway's population increased, a general movement back into vacated areas took place, new titles were issued by the king to lands lying idle and reclamation of sorts went on. The Finns intermarried with Norwegians and became part of the community, and no doubt some future studies may reveal a considerable strain of Finnish blood in our church membership.

Lying closer to Oslo, news of free land came early to this valley, and we find the first leave-taking for USA taking place in 1846. By 1860 ten percent of the people had left. In the period of our Civil War, 200 more set sail, the year 1862 showing a count of 149. The emigration continued steadily into the mid-80's when hardly an able-bodied young man remained in Hurdal. We know this because the clergy were charged with keeping records of their parishioners; ages, sex, marital status, and occupation are entered of all emigrants during these hectic years.

The Hurdal bygdebok, written by Olav Tvetter, a relative of the Westegaard family, is a large, very complete and interesting work. Besides furnishing a large amount of geneology, it describes the living, economic and social conditions of the valley since the time of reclamation.



Jens Hendriksen was a Finn. He was also the man credited with opening a part of the highland of Hurdal to cultivation and obtaining title thereto back in the 1640's. A descendant, eighth in line, named Even Nilsen, who was married at least twice, had among his family three sons who with their families emigrated and played a part in the development of our community. The family holding was part of Rognlia and the descendants afford us a good example of name confusion mentioned earlier.

Two of the brothers, ninth in succession, left Norway in 1867 and found their way to LaCrosse county later that year. One of these came to this area 2 years after that and settled on the land now being the residence quarter-section owned by LaVerne Gullicksrud. He had taken his fathers name in approved Norwegian manner and was known as Even Evenson. This man was described as ambitious and intelligent. More of him later.

The second brother, Martin E., operator of the home place in the old country, probably felt the gaard name should be perpetuated and called himself Rognlien. From him stem the many of that name that have lived here, also numerous descendants of daughter marriages. Martin E. Rognlien lived in LaCrosse county 2 years before coming here to settle on the quarter-section (NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 30) west of half-brother Even.

Johannes, oldest of the three, after selling in 1870, came directly to this area. He had lived in the valley part of Rognlia and took the name "Dal", meaning valley. Spelling was later changed to "Dahl". Several of his sons came with him. Most newcomers were interested in land and its possibilities. the sons differed. They became merchants and were very successful. J. H. Mathison, a well-known local store operator, was a grandson. Other descendants here are many.

Another Hurdal family, Hans Moltzau, wife and two children, undoubtedly accompanied the Rognliens on that trip across the ocean in 1867. They lived in Bostick Valley, LaCrosse county, long enough for two children to attend school before coming here in 1870. His grandfather served in the Norwegian army as a lieutenant and a great-grandfather was "prest" of Hurdal parish for 7 years, about 1810 or 1814.

These first four men, with their families, about 20 in all, were followed by more than a dozen Hurdalings. Gustav Gullicksrud and his wife were first, then Peter Bunkrud, wife and four children, Nels Garson, Olaus Christenson and wife, John Nelson, and Olof Indgjer.

Hurdal is separated from Toten on the north by a range of hills. (A road between the two bygds was well traveled and many families on either side of the ridge were related. From the northern community came Johannes Frodal with his large family, Sever Matson and family, Johannes Christianson, Even Holte and a brother. Later came the Klavestads with their variety of names.

While nearly all parts of Norway had representatives in this area, some will go unidentified. Two areas, that of Trondheim and the large valley of Gudbrandsdal should be mentioned. From the first came Sivert Rekstad, who served as secretary of the St. Paul's congregation for all except two of



57 years. Rindal is in proximity of this place and contributed the active Romundstad brothers, and Frederick Olson.

Gudbrandsdal was the home of the John Eide family, Peter Bjornstad, wife and three sons, Jakob Myhers, Lars Johnson, and Knut Kleven. It is a long, beautiful, and populace valley, undoubtedly others came from here also.

Only one of the Norwegians settling here had served in the Civil War. Christopher Swendby had that distinction and Hans Moltzau accompanied him up from LaCrosse county when both selected land on the same day, being the two quarter-sections south of Even Evenson's land. It is very evident that Evenson had influenced all.

#### THIS AND THAT

Why did these people end their travels here? When asked this question in later years, one of these men told of receiving a letter from an acquaintance already settled at this place. The letter was short and to the point; it read "This is a good place, here are fish and fowl in large figures, here you must come." "So," he said, "I came."

We have mentioned that life was hard in the old country. The Hurdal bygdebok furnishes considerable data and facts. The production of various gaards and small land owners dates back 200 to 300 years. For the small operator, a cow or two, three or four sheep, and one horse was a usual listing of livestock. Owners of highland pasture lands had up to 20 cattle and one man counted 34 sheep in 1850. That same year the Gullicksrud's produced 31 bushels of barley, 200 bushels of potatoes, and four bushels of peas, from an area about equal to 20 acres, which included a bit of pasture.

That Norway of 1850 had two distinct classes of people was generally an accepted fact. Government officials, professional men, large land owners, and the clergy were the educated. On the lower side, comprising about 95 percent of the population, were the small bonde (Landowner) husmen and laborers.

Although the country had adopted a liberal constitution in 1814 with education provision for all, several early arrivals here could write little beyond their own names. An edict by the state church, date unknown, required that all should have instruction and be confirmed into the Lutheran faith. For this, reading was necessary and most were adept at handling that part of the language, but use of the pen was limited. Of course, there were exceptions as there are in our schools today. Our early church records are well-kept, neat, and written in good style.

The clergy had a busy life immediately following the reclamation. Not only were they charged with many secular duties by the king, but the Finns occupying the timbered areas caused much trouble. Life was tough. The "tollekniv" (Hand knife) was carried to church, and although a cut inflicted on Sunday cost an extra rigsdaler in fine, the penance coffer for this was never empty. Baptisms, weddings, and funerals were often scenes of violent



brawling. Many pastors closed their eyes. They preached, baptized, and buried with little attention to the social life of their members.

Thievery was common and the community book tells of the "lensmand"(sheriff) locating a large cache in the high timberland and catching two Finns. Law was such in 1696 that possession of stolen goods in excess of 250 rigsdalers carried the death penalty. On his way to Eidsvold, the area government seat, the sheriff crossed a bridge. The height seemed ample so without further fuss he administered the penalty to the luckless pair.

You may well question the propriety of this telling and its position in a church history. There is good reason. The path of Christianity has never been smooth. King Olaf used the sword where leaders and inhabitants were slow in forsaking Odin and Thor. The black plague carried away good men in service of the church at that time. The reformation caused another upheaval and sincere over-burdened members of the clergy could never reach their goals while serving both government and God.

Some release from most secular duties came prior to 1800, permitting an opportunity to devote full time to the faith. A certain refinement of living accompanies Christianity. As you travel about our country you may notice that a clean, well-kept town or city usually has an active church, or several, influencing the quality of life among its residents. So it was back in the old country, a change for the better, a refinement, had taken place. The first comers here lived with much hardship, but they had respect for the better things of this life.

Surprisingly, very few of these early-comers had any interest in revisiting their homeland. Although many had close relatives living and could easily afford the trip in later years, only one of this first number returned for a short stay. More interest in renewing acquaintanceship is apparent among the third and fourth generations than the first.

#### SETTLEMENT — ITS PROBLEMS

A point has now been reached in this discourse where a few paragraphs about laws affecting first land acquisition, an early-day description of this area, and first settlement might be in order.

A barren land greeted the eyes of the first white man that peered over these ridges a century or more ago. Glacial advance thousands of years previously had carried with it deposits of silt and rock. The melting of that vast ice sheet and the subsequent runoff had carried away much light humus, leaving the heavier sany sediment so characteristic of such river valleys. Add to this, in later years, an annual burning of all underbrush by the Indians to insure a blueberry crop, caused the whole country to present a far different picture than one which greets us today.

With lucrative fields further west, speculators had wasted little time here. Consequently, this locality was the last settled in this part of Wisconsin. Another obstacle was the distance to market and that no railroad had been planned.



Wisconsin was admitted to the Union in 1848 and surveyed for development in the next few years, using a plan instituted by President Thomas Jefferson. Unlike many eastern states, where land is described by irregular metes and bounds, our state is divided into squares, except where geographical boundaries dictate. The Illinois-Wisconsin border forms the base for a succession of parallel horizontal lines dividing the state northward at 6-mile intervals. A vertical line at the center of the state extending from this base to Lake Superior with parallel lines on each side at 6-mile intervals, dissects the first series to form 6-mile squares called townships. Unity township is located below the 24th horizontal and west of the 8th vertical which is its legal description. Further divisions at mile, half, and quarter divisions provides further and final information. Each of these intersections was marked originally by measurements to natural objects, some long gone. This very year an attempt is being made to re-establish such corners in this county.

Two Legislative Acts in 1862 affected land acquisition locally. The first was a Homestead Law whereby a settler could select a quarter section (160 acres) of land and obtain title by living thereon and improving the property for a period of 3 years. A \$30 fee, paid to the land office at LaCrosse, would then bring a land patent signed by the President himself, and many a proud newcomer was able to write to relatives in the old country and tell of this wonderful happening. Several of these originals may be found in safekeeping boxes in this community today.

That year also marked passage of the Railroad Act, providing promoters of the Tomah-Hudson Railroad every odd-numbered section of land for 10 miles on either side of the road bed when track was laid. The proposed line skirted the edge of the great pine forest, was built in the late 1860's, and resulted in establishing the villages of Augusta and Fairchild, both of which played an important part in development here. If pre-emptions prevented the Railroad Company from securing title to all land granted them, an extra 10 miles was allowed, which accounts for many original abstracts showing such original ownership here.

A populated and developed land was to railroad advantage and reliable men were appointed agents, selling quarter sections for \$200 (\$1.25 per acre) and settlement went on. Eau Claire had its first train in 1870. Prior to that time most freight to that small city came up the Chippewa River.

Nearly all land around what is now Osseo, Eleva, and in the township of Hale, had been taken when Esten Johnson Dahl, his wife, and family came down the Beef River Valley in mid-June 1868. Ottertail County, Minnesota (Fergus Falls) was open for settlement and their planned destination. A hard 2-week journey was ahead with crossing of the Chippewa River at Eau Claire and a ferry at St. Paul, not to mention innumerable streams in between and farther west. Esten immigrated in 1860, had lived in Cannon Valley, LaCrosse County, several years, and was in good condition for travel. His heavily loaded schooner was pulled by a good team of



*Esten Johnson Dahl*



horses, and younger members of his family herded two cows with them as they moved.

*Mary Dahl*  
He evidently had prospected in this area earlier because a son John <sup>Dahl</sup> (father of Mrs. Oscar Olson), then nine, remembered years later of their camping near the stream in Section 17, about where the Julian Johnson home is located, and of his father riding up the valley early the next morning, coming back in a short time, happy that good land was yet available. Plans were changed, the family quickly moved up stream until they reached the large spring in Section 29. They had barely arrived when a terrific thunderstorm broke and the son remembered that all took refuge under the wagon and of his mother praying that this stop would end their journeys. The date has been verified as June 18, 1868, and they were the first Norwegian settlers in this immediate area. Spencer Olson and family now reside on the property Esten claimed.

The new arrivals had neighbors. On their way down the river valley the Williams and Langerfield homes had been passed. North of the present village lived Jack Carter, after whom the valley is named. To the west was old Ed Lyons, the Wingads, Websters, Teeples, and finally at 12-mile station was Civil War veteran Russell Bowers, newly-appointed postmaster for the area and oldest settler here. He called the post office "Hamlin," and operated a small store.

These families were all New Englanders, several of them veterans, all of great help to the many Norwegians that moved in. The newcomers always had great respect for these friendly people, consulted them often about laws and language problems, and had only favorable comment about their "Yankee" neighbors. Two of them accompanied Ole Thomasgaard as references, he being the first local immigrant to obtain citizenship. As the community population was predominantly Scandinavian, that language was used almost exclusively at first with the English-speaking settlers understanding and eventually leaning a conversant Norwegian.

Except for a few Indians, the Dahl family was alone in the valley until spring, when at dusk one evening two men came down off the west ridge, tired after an all-day hunt for land. To the surprise of all they were countrymen and the next morning the Flaten brothers staked land up the valley, and before summer was too far gone, Engebret Pederson settled beyond them. With a neighbor (Evenson) coming into the west valley, this was a wilderness no longer.

What a busy year 1870 must have been. Nearly all land had been pre-empted or purchased from the railroad. Shanties and hillside dugouts were springing up in every coulee, with small strips of first plowings appearing near each. Treeless ridges served as grazing land for domestic animals herded by children. Wildlife was abundant but disappearing, the creeks would yield trout, one or 50, at the whim of the angler. Wagon ruts served as roads, bridges were nonexistent, walking was the fastest means of communication except if one was fortunate to own a horse. Oxen pulled huge breaking plows and could turn an acre in a long day with two men in attendance. The wheat was cut with a cradle and threshed with a flail, and nearly every creek of any size was dammed to power two millstones that flour



could be ground. For the children, spring and fall school terms were soon available, classes being held in homes at first. Youth, not old enough for the pineries, often attended, so the new language might come more quickly.

The first settlers had a hard lot but they were happy. Homes had been established after a fashion. Work in the pineries was available for the winter and the future looked bright. Not so with members of the friendly Winnebago tribe, paying a last sad visit to favorite haunts. In following years a few would drift back for another look. It was a familiar transition.

Indians had never been many in this area. An authoritative source once estimated the population of all tribes in the U.S. to be around one million in 1830. Compared to the present population of 200 million, the ratio would be about 200 to 1 with concentration just opposite, the whites along the two sea coasts, the Indians here in the Midwest and plain states. Old timers stated often that not over 25 Indians lived here, but did add that hunting parties of 80 to 100 were not uncommon.

#### THE COMING OF THE CLERGY AND THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH

Close behind the first settler and far ahead of the last, sometimes on horseback, often afoot, came the lone Norwegian clergyman. They were few at first because the old country government took a dim view of emigration, and the state church ignored the situation altogether, except to criticize anyone for wanting to leave. Their attitude had changed on learning that laymen were preaching and organizing congregations. A representative was sent to report with the result that pastors became available when settlement came here. These men were welcome. A quick call at all shanties and dugouts in the vicinity usually brought every able-bodied person to hear the message. Few homes in this area could accommodate very many, so meetings were held in sheds or under a tree, where available. Baptisms were always waiting, a marriage at times, and invariably a graveside visit, for deaths were many.

A few words regarding Lutheranism in Norway at this point may provide a better understanding of developments in America during settlement days. In spite of its position, the church had been forced to consider change around the turn of the century. Endowed by law and enjoying government protection as well, one could almost say a laziness had developed in the church, with many pastors merely going through gestures. Criticism was not loud because law forbid any but a state-ordained man the right to preach.

Into this atmosphere came Hans Nilsen Hauge, born in 1771. He had read Luther's works by the age of 25 and began preaching to whomever would listen and there were many. It is told his message was awakening and well received throughout the whole country. About 1804 he was jailed for this revivalism and confined for 10 years. Amidst the subsequent hue and cry, laws were eased somewhat.

The young layman's followers continued his work and the most active of these was Elling Eielsen. When Norway became too sensitive to his preaching, he moved to Denmark where the Danes did not tolerate him long.



Eielsen crossed the ocean in 1839 and headed for Chicago, a frontier town at that date and hub for immigrants already here. Settlements were being made in northern Illinois and Wisconsin territory also and the layman found a ready field. If his sincerity was in question, the answer soon came. No religious books or tracts were available for the newcomer, neither was a Norwegian printer to be found, so Eielsen set out on foot and walked to New York where he obtained printed translations, returned, and went to work.

Though opposed to traditionalism, he permitted examination by a member of the German clergy and was ordained in 1843 to become the first Norwegian Lutheran pastor in America. Several congregations were organized through his efforts, but anything that characterized the state church was omitted. No ritual or liturgy was permitted; pastors were chosen from the ranks and wore no vestments. A recent article in a daily paper having local circulation concerned the only pastor remaining of Eielsen's synod. Four congregations remain in as many states. The service is a plain, simple worship service to this day.

The second layman to enter the field was Claus Clausen. He had been educated as a teacher and was called to serve as such at Muskego, a settlement some 20 miles southwest of Milwaukee. Clausen was born a Dane and had been impressed by Hauge. He emigrated from Norway about the same time as Eielsen, although he was considerably younger. He saw on arrival at Muskego that a pastor was needed, offered to be examined by the German clergy, was ordained, and called to serve the area. He organized several congregations among the Norwegians, and in 1845 completed the first worship house in America for them. This building can now be seen at the seminary grounds in St. Paul.

The third to come was J.W.C. Dietrichsen, in 1844, the first representative of the state church. He was educated and ordained by that body, and one purpose of his coming was to view and report the situation to his sponsors. Dietrichsen was a big man physically, energetic, and a good organizer. He was strictly of the high-church order, insisted on full ritual, liturgy, and discipline. Described as pompous and autocratic, he soon aroused controversy and became embroiled in a silly lawsuit which he lost. He did organize eight congregations in a years time before returning in attempt to recruit more pastors. Mr. Dietrichsen returned to America for another slightly longer stay and left among his co-workers the thought of establishing a synod. Continued disturbance marked his last visit also. Clausen was treated with disdain and he would not recognize Eielsen at all. Rumors of his conduct circulated among Norwegian settlements, including our own, years later.

New arrivals in the U.S. expected complete religious freedom but few anticipated the number of denominations with which they would come in contact. Their old state church forbade any relationship with secret fraternities, societies, and especially Free Masonry. Here there were near a dozen Norwegian Lutheran Fraternal organizations within a few years, and insurance societies were also clamoring for membership. Old country pastors were also disturbed at lack of religious instructions in public school, some insisted this would be the downfall of the country. Their several attempts at correcting this situation brought no result except to antagonize.



Lack of Norwegian instruction, some maintained, would end Lutheranism in America. The language, they insisted, must be preserved.

By 1850 the Norwegian Church realized nothing could be done about halting the exodus of their countrymen and began sending pastors to organize and serve as best they could. Several very able men were in the first contingent and eventually followed Dietrichsen's plan, and after two attempts formed the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Synod in 1853. Thirty-eight congregations joined; 31 in Wisconsin, three in Illinois, and four in Iowa, all served by only eight pastors. As these were educated and ordained in the old country, all were of a conservative view similar to their mother church.

As time moved, the synod stressed its teaching of the "clear, untarnished truth." Its unswerving discipline among pastors and members alike, seems to have been basic cause for dissention that arose in later years. The first three pastors mentioned portrayed the clergy of that day -- Dietrichsen, high church; Eielsen, low church; and Clausen, middle roader -- each of these attracted support among their countrymen for various reasons.

The Norwegian Synod grew as the influx of immigrants continued in an unabated stream, only Eielsen and his followers were strictly separate. They had no serious dissention until the country was torn by the slavery problem during the Civil War. Every organization in the north, church or secular, took a stand. The Synod's 50-year "fest" book spends some pages on discussion of the question and attempts to explain the hesitation of that body. When the Rev. Clausen, chaplain of the 4th Wisconsin Regiment, arose at a general church convention and demanded explanation, the matter was referred to the bishop of Norway. Far removed from the controversy, he deliberated until the war had ended and came with an unsatisfactory reply 2 years later. The image of the Synod suffered when a vague report on the question was brought before their convention in 1869. Much of the decision concerned itself with criticism of the Rev. Clausen for forcing consideration of the matter.

In the early 1860's it had become apparent that the influx of pastors did not keep pace with immigration. An agreement was entered into with the German Missouri Synod to enter candidates for the ministry at their St. Louis seminary. Until the Madison Seminary was set up, this cooperation effort helped relieve the situation, but from this association came a ground work for issues that generated the split of a hairline doctrine, which affected our community and also caused an anti-Missouri splinter of Lutherans.

Scandinavians take credit for organizing 13 church synods or conferences. Of these the Swedes and Danes had one each with an unbelievable 11 being Norwegians.

#### CHOICE OF AFFILIATION

End of the Civil War marked the beginning of a new era in this country. Unparalleled boom in immigration was matched by industrial growth, land development and population movement. In spite of government and clergy



opposition, Norway was about to experience its greatest exodus of young men and women, who had no intention of returning. With this outmovement would come increasing demand for pastoral help. The "Norsk" Synod, yet without a seminary, resumed its connection with the German Synod and sent its candidates to Concordia at St. Louis for theological education, to be examined and ordained upon graduation. Together with a few men ordained and sent by the state church in Norway, the pastors spread themselves thinly over the fast-growing settlements.

Transplanted Norwegian Lutherans could be classified in three groupings. First, of course, was Eielsen's small synod with most members in northern Illinois. As mentioned earlier, they were loosely formed in 1846 and re-organized in 1876 as Hauge's Synod. There were no active adherents in this community.

Second came the immigrants who had been receptive to Hauge's preaching of a "living Christianity." The working classes had been his most fertile field; and as these comprised the great majority of newcomers, it was only natural that many hesitated before committing themselves to religious affiliation. They were stolid people, and Eielsen's emotionalism did not appeal. Neither were they attracted by the fluted collars of the Synod pastors and old church requirements. Several liberal-minded pastors were among the few sent over by the state church. These men associated themselves with a pair of Danish groups and in time found they could subscribe to the same constitution with result that formalized a "Konference." Before long they established a seminary of their own and in 1890 merged into the United Lutheran Church to become the largest of Norwegian religious bodies. It was to this "Konference" the St. Paul's group turned, at their organization in 1877.

Last was the well-organized "Norsk" Synod, until 1890 the largest religious group among the Norwegians. Patterned after the old state church, they propounded the "untarnished" truth, demanded discipline in regard to doctrine, and were uncompromising in their stand.

Noted for their literal interpretation of the scriptures, the Norwegian Synod clergy became embroiled, in the 1880's, over a question about God's Grace and man's recognition and acceptance of it for salvation. The question was tossed into their laps by the Missouri Synod whose clergy had already debated the matter for some time. The hierarchy took their usual untarnished stand. Pastors who did not agree became at odds for a few years and finally began withdrawing from the Synod in 1886, and within 3 years a little more than one-third were gone, usually taking their flocks with them. Many joined the Conference standing on the sidelines; others formed an anti-Missouri group.

The situation became quite heated. Families became split in their affiliation, pastors of different opinions and stands refused to speak. Withdrawals usually resulted in new buildings by the smaller group of members, which is the reason we can yet see two church buildings in many Scandinavian settlements. When the leaders passed on, the battle abated and finally resolved into merger of all major Norwegian bodies in 1917. Older members of our congregation remember this well.



The folly of this dissension is best illustrated with a true story related by a former pastor of this community. A local elderly parishioner with a droll outlook about the old controversy, had several times mentioned his lost position. When finally questioned regarding reasons for this thinking, he replied, the confirmation class of which he was a member had been advised, "marriage with a member of the church across the river was unforgivable" and that for him there could be no hope because he "had been happily married with two of them."

The conference had its troubles mostly within its organization. The several men who headed their seminary were opposed to supporting or cooperating with St. Olaf College, which the merged United Church supported. Technicalities of law gave the professors, who also had become incorporators of the seminary, a questionable control of the building. Court decisions played a part in ending this controversy.

#### OUR FIRST PASTORS

As stated, early-day pastors came here either from Norway or were emigrated young men who had completed their theological training at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis.

Ole Waldeland was of the first mentioned. He immigrated in 1866, began his service at Blair, Wisconsin, and has been credited with holding the first worship service here at the Esten Johnson home, believed to have been sometime in late 1869. Whether he called in this area more than once is not known. The Rev. Erik Jensen, who served Trempealeau Valley congregations and others, was the second man to appear here; no mention can be found when or how often.

Lars Sherven completed his studies at Concordia Seminary in the spring of 1871, came to this area shortly afterward, and is credited with founding seven congregations, of which the local was one.

Both Waldeland and Jensen left the Synod ranks to join the anti-Missourians during the doctrinal strife of the 1880's; Sherven did not. While serving our first congregation he lived in a small one-room house in the utmost NW-NE corner of Section 30. There a small daughter died and is buried; and from that place it seemed he served three congregations. How he traveled is anyone's guess, but old Norwegians told of his using skis during winter. Lest it slip our mind, mention should be made of his visit here in 1922, preaching a sermon in the "new" church, and having members of his first confirmation class sitting in the front pew.

With this we are ready to begin the actual history of the Lutheran Church in this community. The rather long background was prepared to provide the reader with a better understanding why plans, decisions, and results turned in the directions to be described. The secretary's books of both congregations are in good condition. Parochial records of the West Beef River congregation are missing as they were consumed in the parsonage fire in 1891. As all minute books prior to the mid-1930's were kept in the Norwegian language, translation is being done that those who follow us may continue research if they wish.



We have discussed troubles within the Conference leaders and the doctrinal split that rent the Synod in the late 1880's, neither events are worthy of more space. That you may form your own opinion regarding the division that came to this community in 1877, we will present the first 14 meetings of the newly-formed congregation, beginning in 1872-73, then follow with the two first meetings of the St. Paul's. Important decisions of our founders will be a verbatim translation, marked "V", and should be interpreted in consideration of the whole.

MINUTE BOOK — HURDAL-IMMANUEL AND WEST BEEF RIVER CONGREGATION

Written in a firm, clear hand, the following explanation informs why the record is in good condition. (Translation verbatim) Page 1

As the congregation's first protocol was found to be unusable, it was decided to buy a new and have the old recopied. This is the reason all entries until the below date are written in the same hand. The entries will show the original name at time of organization on January 7, 1873, to be Hurdal, but on April 16 of the same year changed to Immanuel, then on September 16, 1874, to the present West Beef River congregation. The congregation's first God's house was built in the Spring of 1877 (prior to that meetings were held in dwellings). There were two frame houses without steeples, one on the north side of the river, one on the south. Our church was built in 1887, now stands, beside the burial plot (1 acre square) and on which the congregation has a deed, also it owns one-half acre west of the church site on which it has deed.

The four-rods-wide strip which lies between the church site and the west lot is the continuation of the road that comes up from the prairie and continued between Section 20 and 21 and at one time divided Sections 28 and 29 but was discontinued back to the south line of the church property.

West Beef River Congregation  
January 19, 1895

Secretary in 1895 was Lars J. Dahl and we are indebted to him for this well written statement which appears on the very first page.

-----  
THE FIRST MEETING

- V - Congregational meeting held at Simon Rice (SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 30) the 7th day of January 1873 for that part of Elk Creek congregation that, following a congregational decision at Ole Olson Hegg (NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  Sec. 23 8) the second day of December 1872, was separated from same.



So reads the introductory statement and it is evident that several may have belonged to the Elk Creek congregation in the Town of Hale. The Hegg residence was just south of the SE corner of Unity. No record of the Elk Creek group as of that date can be located.

- V - Decided that this congregation be self-supporting and known as Hurdal Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation.

What do you imagine the newcomers from Tolga and other places in the old country thought of this selection?

- Decided the pastor hold worship services on festival days and on week days at specified times at a salary of \$55.00 per year.

There is no mention of Rev. Sherven being present, but through the years word has come down that he was the organizer.

- Officers were elected:  
H. J. Rognlien as precentor (klokker)  
Esten Johnson and Ole Lien as helpers (deacons)  
Nils Kleven, Even Evenson, and Johannes Christianson as trustees.

Both deacons and two of the trustees have descendents as present members of our congregation. How interesting to have known who attended this meeting.

-----

The second meeting of Hurdal congregation was held at the Even Evenson residence (NE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 30) on April 16, 1873.

- V - The members of Big Creek congregation present at the meeting were accepted as advisory members.

Here is an interesting revelation. Big Creek had its first Norwegian settlers (Skoug and Frederik Olson) at least a year earlier than any in our community. Some pastor may have served the area earlier than Pastor Sherven.

- The matter of church site and burial plot was discussed. Even Evenson offered a space, 12 rods by 24, lying along the north line of his property, east of the center point of that property.

The Big Creek members expressed their satisfaction with that location and the plot was gratefully accepted.

This would be space north and west of the newly-constructed LaVerne Gullicksrud residence (NW corner NE NE Sec. 30). Keep in mind, no buildings existed on the present village site at this time; several years would elapse before Thore Holden set up a small store west of the present St. Paul's cemetery location.

- Plans were discussed for breaking ground on the offered lot, division of lots, board and pole fence, etc. Also the very



first of countless committees through the years was appointed. Again the visitors spoke satisfactorily and mentioned a merger.

- V - Decided the congregation's first selected name "Hurdal" be dropped and the name be Immanuel Norwegian Evangelical Congregation.

Could this be the first straw of dissatisfaction? Did the immigrants from Tolga, Rindalen, Gudbrandsdal, and other places feel a certain geographical reference was out of order? As usual, minutes reveal only decisions.

- V - Discussion regarding a constitution. That of the Norwegian Synod was read and adopted in part. H. J. Rognlien was elected Secretary.

-----

- Immanuel third congregational meeting held at Esten Johnson Dahl school May 11, 1873.

A matter of scriptural interpretation for confirmands was the subject of a petition signed by several members. An explanation settled the question.

A question regarding laymen's activities was discussed. No action.

Here are the first, and only, issues regarding teachings, doctrinal questions, etc., raised at any of these first meetings prior to division.

-----

- Immanuel 4th congregational meeting at Esten Johnson Dahl September 17, 1873.

Decided the congregation give the Western Wisconsin Railroad Company a sum of \$100.00 for the SW SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 19-24-8 and that each member be bound to pay a proportionate share of this cost for parsonage ground for the pastor.

Here is the first hint that progress has not been smooth. Evenson resigned as trustee at this meeting. The land description mentioned above is now the home 40 acres owned by the Kleven Brothers. An examination of the abstract covering the above 40 acres revealed no further action.

- V - Martin E. Rognlien was elected trustee and H. J. Rognlien Secretary-Treasurer to fill Evenson's position.

Is this a partial answer or explanation?

-----

- Meeting of Immanuel Congregation February 16, 1874 at Martin E. Rognlien home (NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  Section 30).



Constitution considered.  
Discussion regarding cemetery layout.  
Decision to deal with Even Evenson regarding the present  
parsonage.

The Norwegian Synod constitution was adopted but the congregation did not join at this time, in fact 21 years elapsed before there was further action regarding this, the records of the Synod do not recognize West Beef River membership until 1895. Regarding the last entry: Evenson had become a land agent for the Ideal Land and Loan Co. As such he was active in real estate dealings. The entry is rather long but definitely hints that Rev. Sherven built the house (12'x16') the year previously and the dealing would trade the house for land.

-----

- Immanuel congregational meeting at Engebret Pederson (SW ¼ Sec. 33) on March 18, 1874.

Pastor Sherven asked to be relieved of one-half the call to work further in new settlements.

Meeting was held after a service.

-----

- Meeting at Simon Rice after services April 2, 1874.

Decided to call Pastor Møller as Pastor Sherven was leaving. A fee of \$5.00 per worship service was promised plus festival offerings.

-----

Meeting at Esten Johnson Dahl school June 4, 1874.

Decided to buy the parsonage, trustees delegated to purchase if the price is reasonable. House to be used as a meeting place.

- V - Nils Kleven was appointed to burial ground committee as Even Evenson did not seem interested enough to attend meetings (actual language).

The little "parsonage" building became attached to a larger living house and the whole later burned. No hint of serious doctrinal dispute is yet evident as one studies these minutes, only the matter of laymen's activity will appear in the years ahead. Does the coming separation seem to involve personalities or mere liberal-conservative factional dispute?

- Meeting of Immanuel congregation on June 14, 1874 at the Ole Thomasgaard residence (SW NW Sec. 29). (Now Gordon Hoff residence)



The meeting considered the offer of the Western Wisconsin Railroad Co. of 16 by 20 rods square in the corner of the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the SE  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 19 as a site for church building and burial plot. Gift accepted and plans were made for use of this property.

This site is the southwest corner of the present Jerry Bergerson property just across the road north of Evenson's first offer. Several burials were made here and when the present two cemeteries were finally platted and in use, remains were removed to either of the latter. Evenson was the record owner of the above property. Pastor Sherven had left.

- 
- Meeting of Immanuel congregation held at the residence of Johannes Christianson (SW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Section 8) (now Mel and Louis Christianson) on September 16, 1874.
  - Meeting was for the members of Immanuel and Big Creek congregations who at this time merged and took the name of West Beef River Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church. Parsonage was sold to Evenson for \$160.00. Congregation decided to build a meeting house, size to be 24' by 32'. J. Ballerud and Even Evenson were appointed to secure deed to 2 acres of land for church site.

Evenson's appointment seems rather unusual after revelations of earlier meetings, but a little search of land records show his control of much property. He was interested in the present West Beef River cemetery grounds about the time their meeting house was built. Also, notice the change back to a geographical reference as a name for the congregation.

- 
- Meeting of the West Beef River Congregation at the Hans Paulson farm home (NW NE of Section 8) on January 16, 1875.

Thompson Valley Congregation laid claim for their proportionate share of parsonage sale. Disallowed.

A. J. Lyon offered 2 acres of land for church building and burial site, on the south side of the river near the bridge, which was unanimously accepted.

Eleven men signed the minutes. H. J. Rognlien, the Secretary and religious teacher, had died during the fall.

Four cemeteries and building sites have now been considered, yet no building and no explanation for the delays. A small meeting house on the Ole J. Romundstad farm (NW NW Section 4) had been erected at an earlier date and was in use. The site was east and across the road from the present Rone residence. Pastor Møller was now serving the West Beef River congregation.



-----  
Meeting of West Beef River members held at Johannes Christian-  
son farm home on December 12, 1875.

- Discussion held as to location of a meeting house. A. J. Lyon offered 2 acres of land for this purpose, lying west of the Carter Creek Road and south of the Osseo-Mondovi Road. Unanimously accepted. Adjourned until January 12, 1876.

The description of the Lyon's offer is interesting. Except for a small living house, no buildings existed on the present village site of Strum, south of the river, at this time. Various historical sketches invariably tell of two small store buildings on the north side but the first assessment roll of Unity (organized in 1878) has nothing indicating this. The Carter Creek Road (named for Jack Carter, settler on the Moltzau farm) is now the Main Street of Strum. The Osseo Road is now Woodland Drive, and crossed the bridge at the present place, then headed west to the Lyon's farm (now Ron Olson's) on its way to Hamlin and Mondovi. The 2 acres offered were likely on the west side of Main Street across from our present church.

-----  
-1876-

The recopied minute book of the West Beef River congregation has no entries for 1876. Whether the old records were in too poor condition to be recopied, or lost, is not mentioned by L. J. Dahl, Secretary; neither do Inga or Julia Dahl recall him mentioning this lapse in the records. In any event, it was a year of controversy among the Lutherans in this community. Mr. Dahl's opening statement in the recopied minute book mentions erection of a meeting house on the present West Beef River cemetery site during the spring of 1877. Acquisition of this land (from Evenson) was one bit of action during the blank year. Pastor Møller served the community on a part-time basis, earning \$67.00 in 1876. We continue with the last West Beef River meeting prior to the separation.

Meeting held January 3, 1877, at Esten Johnson schoolhouse.

- All in favor of calling Rev. J. P. L. Dietrichson as pastor signed their names: J. H. Ballerud, Engebret Pederson, Martin Rognlien, Anton Dahl, Frederik Olson, P. Imuslund, Ludvig Osterhus, Ole Dahl, Paul Peterson, Johannes Rice, Esten Johnson Kornbraaten, Ole A. Thompson, Gilbert A. Nerstad, Johann Syverson, Hans Moltzau, Christian Olson, Kristian Anderson, Johannes Opsahl, Peter Nelson, Ole Bue, Simon Rice, Andreas A. Brendigen, Edward Rise, Ole Lien, Ole Johnson Moe, Gulbrand Pederson, Ole Holstad, Erik Anderson Aaberg, Ingebret Anderson Aaberg, Ole Arneson, Nils K. Hagestad, Anders Anderson, Jakob Rye, Knud Bendikson, Anders Anderson Flaksrud,

-21-

Johannes Dahl, Gulbrand Borreson, Christian Pjaaka, Even Rognlien, Thore Golid, G. O. Gullicksrud, John Petterson, Ole Borreson, Hans A. Hanson, Carl Ballerud, Otto Ballerud, Klement Tandlokken, Ole O. Onsum, Ole Olstad, Johannes Larson, Mattias Larson, Jakob Larson.

The rest of West Beef River congregation members left at above date and organized the St. Paul's congregation of the conference.

The call may not have been the straw that caused separation, but the very bluntness of the language indicates differences had firmed. Read carefully - "All in favor of calling.....rest of West Beef River members left on above date." The Dietrichson mentioned was a second cousin of the controversial namesake who had served in the southern part of the state earlier. The problems of the latter were well known to this community.

Following are the first two meetings of the separated group.

#### THE ST. PAUL'S SCANDINAVIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CONGREGATION

In the back of their first minute book, Sivert Rekstad penned, in 1917, the happenings of early 1877.

Two meetings were held in the winter of 1877, one at Ole J. Romundstad farm (possibly the meeting house), the last at the Esten Johnson school. A decision to communicate with Pastor Gjermund Hoyme of Eau Claire about forming a congregation affiliated with the Danish-Norwegian Conference resulted in a favorable answer. On February 21, Mr. Rekstad rode a mule to that city and the next day escorted the pastor and Professor Gunderson, a visitor at Hoyme's, back to the "Beef River settlement" for a service and meeting at the Even Evenson farm.

Many had gathered and a discussion after the service resulted in a meeting the next day at the Andrew Call home (either SE of Sec. 8 or the SW of Sec. 9).

-----

Meeting at the Andrew Call home February 23, 1877.

Called to order by Pastor Hoyme who was nominated chairman. Even Evenson appointed Secretary. Professor Gunderson of Augsburg Seminary was appointed advisor. After more discussion, a decision to form a congregation was made. Professor Gunderson suggested the name be St. Paul's Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Congregation. Temporary officers were declared permanent; trustees and deacons were elected to serve until the annual meeting.



A constitution was adopted and signed by the following:  
Ole Thomasgaard, Sivert Rekstad, Even Evenson, Berger Semingson, Ole O. Nysven, Peter Bjornstad, Ole J. Romundstad, Gulbrand Jensen, Halvor Isakson, Andreas Nilson, Ole E. Alm, Esten Johnson, Paul Anderson, Erik Hanson, Even Romundstad, Aders J. Romundstad, Ole Skjeremo, Stener Olson, Ellen Anderson, Ole Nilsen, C. Swendby, Larsse Dornes, Martin Olson, Nils Kleven, Ole O. Romundstad, Jr., Ole Ol. Romundstad, Sr., Svend E. Holden, Johannes Christianson, Hans Paulson, Peter Christianson, Otto Johnson, Matt Semingson, Peter Semingson, Arne Erlandson Bjornstad, Mads Nerbovig, Nils Udal, Ole T. Klumsten, Hans P. Sveen, H. E. Hammer, Amund Heflan, Anders J. Lee, Peder O. Longseth, Nicolas Severtson, Samuel Semingson, Christian Pjaaka, Christian Nilson, Paul Christopherson, Taale Christianson, John Elshaug, Christian Torgerson, Anders Larson, Martin Rosholm, John Ness, Thore Moen.

The members then voted to build a church at once. A subscription was taken to finance the building with pledges totaling \$630.50, largest by far was a payment of \$100 by Evenson. Names of several "Yankees" are on this list.

The members wasted little time. The mild winter and spring allowed early construction. The site was, of course, the present St. Paul's cemetery plot. Evenson was the record grantor of this land, too, but the story comes to us that A. J. Lyon donated the 2 acres with the understanding that he and his family would have a burial lot in the cemetery.

On the 18th of May the building was complete enough for the first service; Pastor Hoyme preached his sermon based on Matthew 4:1-11. He traveled from Eau Claire about once a month until the latter part of the next year, when Pastor C. J. Helsem of Chippewa Falls began his long tenure.

And so we have separation. Did the continual hesitation over selection of a site seem a factor to you? Did the prompt action by the separated group indicate that some wanted a church building? Your opinion is as good as any. Judging from what is recorded, this was not a bitter doctrinal dispute such as those occurring in the late 1880's.

Again we have a busy year. During the spring of 1877 both a West Beef River meeting house and the St. Paul's church went up.

Following will be a brief of highlights of both congregations, with each being brought up to 1900 at this writing. Because of the parsonage fire in 1891, the West Beef River highlights will be shorter as we have less material available.

-----  
THE WEST BEEF RIVER EVANGELICAL NORWEGIAN LUTHERAN CONGREGATION

From the minutes we learn this group must have held control over the building on the Ole J. Romundstad farm because of a meeting being held at that place in 1879, considering the call of a new pastor to succeed Dietrichson.

Late in that same year Pastor Sherven gave receipt for final payment of his small salary.

A school committee was appointed in 1880 indicating some tutoring aside from the pastors efforts. Pastor Haakenson of Eau Claire asked to be relieved in November of 1881 and a call went to H. A. Heyer in January.

A seven-man committee was appointed at this meeting and charged with consideration and recommendation for betterment of the meeting house. This committee later presented plans for a new building on the site of the old; size was to be 32' by 40' with a 20' height. An entrance was additional and a steeple of suitable height was mentioned. No architect submitted plans for these pioneers. Construction was to begin in 1883. A change in the constitution was made in that year also.

The mid-1880's were pressing times in this area. Railroad facilities were far off, in either Augusta or the Trempealeau Valley. Wheat for market was hauled to these points and work in the pineries brought only \$15.00 per month, so it was only natural that building plans were shelved for awhile. An interesting note in the West Beef River minutes of January 1884 mentions a proposed merger with the St. Paul's congregation; no results or acknowledgement, and no mention of this in the sister congregation's records.

Support of the Ladies Aid was urged at an October meeting in 1884. The pastor's salary was in arrears \$375.85 at the annual meeting of 1885, this had been reduced to \$253.65 three years later, annual wages being \$125.00. A new church building came up in 1887 but the annual meeting 2 years later reveals the construction yet unfinished as meetings for the winter months were scheduled for the Romundstad meeting house. Reason given: the church was unsuitable for cold weather use.

In 1891 a fire destroyed the parsonage of Pastor H. Heyer, and with it the ministerial records up to that time. The house had been constructed by the pastor so the matter of rebuilding did not fall on the congregation.

Exhuberant youth have always been with us. Minutes of 1895 order the pastor to hold confirmation instruction in the gallery and not to allow destructive boys in the auditorium of the church. In the year 1894 the congregation voted to join the Norwegian Synod, "providing an examination revealed the Synod to be sound financially." They joined.

Dedication of the church building was held June 23, 1896.

No difference or questions regarding scriptural interpretation had been raised all these years, at least the minutes reveal nothing, but it was common for the older members to accost the pastor at the sacristy door regarding a particular hard-hitting sermon that fit a little too closely. In December of 1898 minutes of the annual meeting encloses a signed statement by 27 members requesting the resignation of Pastor Heyer. This was followed by a meeting a month later, conducted by Pastor H. Halvorson, Vice President of the Synod (N. E. Halvorson's father). He returned for another meeting in July when Pastor Heyer's resignation was agree as of October 1.



NOTE: Pastor Heyer had become influenced by the anti-Missouri movement within the Synod, and this may have started the controversy. Older members recall this happening. Heyer later joined the anti-Missouri group.

-----

THE ST. PAUL'S SCANDINAVIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CONGREGATION

The separated group became part of the Danish-Norwegian "Konference." A previous paragraph mentioned this organization. Lutheran ritual was practically unchanged from the old country church, pastors wore the traditional fluted collars, and the constitution provided for the usual discipline.

An interesting sentence in the latter concerned the pastors, their conduct, and teachings. Quote: "Should the pastor be guilty of false teachings, etc., the matter shall be handled according to Matthew 18:17; but should he persist in being "stiff-necked" the matter shall be placed with the Conference." The minutes reveal no actions regarding this.

We do find several instances where the congregation took action regarding individual members and their inattentiveness regarding instruction for their children. Pastor C. J. Helsem, who served from late 1878 until 1914, usually gave a lengthy parochial report which provides insight into activities and growth of the congregation. These reports are not found in West Beef River records, but may have been given orally.

Even Evenson was elected secretary of the first meeting and was succeeded at the annual meeting of 1879 by Sivert Rekstad, who, with the exception of one term, held this office until 1935, a span of 55 years. His minutes are very complete, giving much detail not commonly found in such records.



*Sivert Rekstad*

As stated, the St. Paul's building was complete enough for a service on May 18, 1877, hardly 3 months after the decision had been made to build. It was not a very large building, but older members claimed it was the first Lutheran Church with a steeple in the Beef River Valley. The beginning pages of the secretary's book are filled with subscriptions and lists of payments for this construction, and at the annual meeting held December 5, 1879, the records seem to reveal a cost of slightly over \$2,500 and that collections were \$818 less. All bills had been paid with an advance by Even Evenson.

Two years later, with the congregation in arrears on pastors salary (reported at \$125 annually), Evenson announced he would discount this indebtedness to \$500 if payment could be made by April 5 the following spring. The offer was "happily" accepted and a drive was successful in raising this money.

A paragraph regarding this unusual man, Evenson, is not out of order. An old newspaper clipping (in Norwegian) describes him as ambitious, influential, and "smart." Old settlers agreed and added another adjective -

temperamental. Evenson offered the first site for parochial use. He is the grantor of both cemetery plots now in use, and was grantor of the first cemetery site, later discontinued. All of the above verified by abstracts of title. He and his family left for the west about 1882, how far and where they went is unknown. An elderly acquaintance told of receiving a letter from Mrs. Evenson, written far out on a western prairie on a Sunday evening. Evenson was playing hymns on an organ in their covered wagon (he was the first organist also), both wishing themselves back in the Wisconsin hills. One person among our present members can remember his distinctly.



*Even Evenson*

The first ministerial records portray very vividly the harshness of pioneer life. An epidemic of diphtheria, a frequent winter visitor, swept through the settlement during the winter of 1878. No medical aid was available and rare was the family that escaped without death of a child. The ministerial records for that year reveal 20 deaths, three were between 11 and 21, the other 17 were under 7 years of age. A small headstone near the west end of the St. Paul's cemetery marks the first interment. It was a dark day for Hans and Dorothea Hammer. Four children, ages 7 months to 7 years, all they had, were laid in one grave. The cause was diphtheria, the date, January 8, 1878.

A funeral was a taxing day for the pastor. Custom was to hold a service at the home of the deceased, then a long trek over impassable roads to the church, a second service, and then the committal. In one of Pastor Helsem's parochial reports he mentions a wornout mother being laid in a grave with her four children.

Edvard, son of Nils and Ingeborg Kleven, was baptized at the meeting of February 22, 1877. Sven Holden and Ingrid Johnson were married later that year, the first wedding in the church.

The year 1880 was notable in one respect, the congregation hired Fred Ranes, a seminary student, as parochial school teacher, with a salary of \$20 per month. Also, the annual meeting makes note of a collection for painting the exterior of the building.

At the annual meeting of 1881 Pastor Helsem presented his first parochial report which shows 25 children baptized, 6 confirmed, 8 burials, and 6 sick calls during the year. 133 had communed and although no census had been made, he estimated the congregation represented 430 souls. Forty-two persons had communed the first year.

At the 1882 meeting a committee was appointed to investigate the validity of the deed held by the congregation. At this meeting Andrew Call withdrew, the first to do so, giving as his reason that he felt the pastor to be a lazy leader, who was not above putting a pillow under a sinners head. The members accepted his resignation with regrets.



At the same meeting, Fred Ranes proposed that a bushel of wheat per child would be acceptable for teaching pay. Evidently cash was not forthcoming. At the same meeting the pastor's pay was reported in arrears.

Again the matter of money was of great concern during the mid-1880's. The pastor's salary was only \$125 per year, with festival offerings additional. Twenty dollars per working month had been promised the parochial teacher, conference dues seemed to be \$12 per year, and the custodian received \$25 per year and furnished his fuel. The latter was usually last to be paid and it remained for Johannes Christianson to, rather effectively, balance the custodian account. It seemed he had served the congregation for several years without reimbursement for either time or fuel. Reading between the lines, one can imagine a rude awakening when members gathered for a service in an unheated building on a bitter winter Sunday. He was paid.

Matters became so stringent during the latter part of the 1880's that a special equalization committee was appointed to fix, more or less, the minimum amount expected from each active member. Unlike the West Beef River, who set a fixed amount for each voting member, the St. Paul's membership included many who contributed nothing.

The parochial report of 1885 tells us that eight people passed away, 27 children were baptized, 12 confirmed, and there were 156 communicants. The pastor was serving Pleasant Valley, Drammen, and Pigeon Falls congregations besides the local. The 1890 report has 11 funerals, 30 baptisms, four couples married, nine families joined the congregation, and 150 communicants. Twenty-five worship services were held and the Northfield congregation was served in addition to the others.

In 1890 the conference congregations became members of the United Church, making that organization the largest Scandinavian Synod in America. The local church was always represented at annual meetings and their former pastor, Gjermund Hoyme, was the first president. Annual dues seemed to be \$20 per year.

An interesting note at the annual of meeting of 1889 informs that St. Paul's congregation voted to begin the "new" liturgy used by the old country state church. Further mention was made of organizing a choir to lead the responses. Pastor Helsem had a good voice and very able at chanting. Also in that year the ladies gave the congregation a new organ, the old one being sold to Pleasant Valley. Sometime previously the hymnal edited by Landstad had been adopted. Many of the hymns were identical with those used by the West Beef River, the numbering was different and included a greater number.

#### BUILDING PROBLEMS

Coming of the railroad in 1889-90 brought an upswing in the economic level of the community. Markets were now local and securing much needed supplies was no longer a 2-day journey. Only one business place remained on the north side of the river, the rest had moved south, closer to the rail line, where new buildings were going up and making the village a busy place.

Proximity to the growing trade center benefited St. Paul's membership and in 1902 several talks resulted in a decision to enlarge. Their original building was only 40-odd feet in length, with no basement to house heating equipment, which meant a very limited seating space.

A plan submitted by secretary Sivert Rekstad was selected, a \$3,000 subscription was raised, and Deacon Svend Holden was chosen foreman for the job. He died before work could begin and G. J. Dahl, a son of Esten Johnson, substituted.

Many remember the unusual design of the "White" church. The 25-year-old structure was sawed in two (from ridge through the floor) near the center. The east part was then moved in that direction 40 feet and a hexagon cross-section 40 by 50 constructed between the two halves. The seating was more than doubled. Twenty years later the roof expanse caused concern and crossed tie-rods were inserted near the ceiling to hold the walls in position.

The Ladies Aid financed construction of the basement and the YPS (Young Peoples Society) purchased a Kilgen pipe organ to complete the project.

Rev. C. J. Helsem served St. Paul's congregation until September 30, 1914, completing 34 years. He was followed by O. J. Hylland who served until early 1920, when he was succeeded by Rev. O. A. Hjemboe.

As the population of the village grew during the early part of the century, we find members of the West Beef River congregation concerned about the location of their church, a mile and one-half out in the country and away from activities that could benefit. Leasing of a house in town for a resident pastor had occurred about 1903. In that year we also find a move authorizing the pastor to circulate a subscription to underwrite costs of moving their church building to the south end of the village. This aroused a furor at the annual meeting but nothing more appears until a special meeting in October 1905, when a rising vote was recorded. Nine were in favor and six negative, with three not voting. Women probably were vocal but had yet to gain suffrage among Lutherans.

At a special meeting during the winter, another vote shows 20 in favor and six in opposition. On February 2, 1907, members were gathered in another special meeting and voted to build a new church (their last had been dedicated barely 10 years earlier), but the next move was to place a \$4,500 ceiling on the cost which smothered any thoughts of moving ahead.

Pastor Toft resigned in 1908 and Rev. Kvaase filled in for a few months until the genial Rev. Sigurd Folkestad took over in 1909.

In early April 1910 a decision was again favorable to build a church 32 feet by 60 feet and a committee appointed to determine costs. Also of interest at this meeting was appointment of a committee to prepare a 40-year observance.

On the last day of April a meeting was held at the Temperance Hall. Building was discussed but no decision recorded. Also, the observance committee



recommended that no further plans be formulated regarding that occasion. NOTE: As this decision came a full year before any anniversary could possibly be due, it was likely these members felt 1871 was the year of beginning. At a special meeting, held the latter part of May at the Temperance Hall, size of the intended building was confirmed, but now someone was questioning the legality of the gathering.

Matters moved slowly; however, in 1914 there came a decision to buy lots of Pastor Folkestad. Older members of our Ladies Aid recall their organization advancing the money for this purchase. At the annual meeting that year building action was again tabled, but in January 1915 a move to build was backed by 28 favorable votes, with six still negative. Pastor Folkestad took leave of absence to visit Norway. Rev. M. Flekke served during the interim and was successful in seeing the building begin and completed. The cost was \$20,000. The first worship service in the new (present) house of worship was held on Easter Sunday, April 23, 1916.

Membership of both congregations is available for that period. The West Beef River congregation reported adult members of 417 with 111 unconfirmed children. Their number shows an increase during the next years. The St. Paul's congregation report for 1915 has 492 confirmed members with 226 children.

Doctrinal differences among the Synod pastors during 1886-88 did not result in further split here, although in Norlies Book, Lutheran Churches of America, published in 1916, there is a note that 60 members left West Beef River and formed an anti-Missouri congregation, later to join the United Church. No such evidence can be found in St. Paul's membership records, nor can any older member recall this.

Neither congregation seemed to underwrite any benevolence of size during these years. Contributions to their respective synod budgets were small. The West Beef River congregation paid their synod \$23 per year around 1900, and St. Paul's congregation was paying \$20 annually at that time to the United Church office. Auxiliary organizations, the Ladies Aid and YPS of both bodies, were active, however. Their contributions will be reported later.

Two new men came on the scene in 1920 to lead local Lutherans. Pastor J. H. Preus, of a well-known name in Synod circles, accepted a call to succeed Pastor Folkestad, and the Rev. O. A. Hjemboe moved from Montana to serve St. Paul's congregation. The union of 1917 and formation of the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church had placed both local bodies in the same synod, and although several older members were not enthused, no disension was apparent.

Few parishioners, and perhaps some participants, had clearly understood the bitter battle of doctrine fought by theologians some 30 years earlier. They, however, were burdened with an attempt to heal the rents caused by this futile debate that had split the Norwegian Lutherans so deeply.

Records show the two pastors were not slow about cooperation. A report at the annual meeting of 1921 tells of the two pastors spending part-time at



summer parochial classes held at the public school building, and both recommended hiring a seminary student to head the school for the next year. Approval was given.

Pastors Hjemboe and Preus substituted for each other on occasion with no audible comment from the members. The latter served until 1930 and was succeeded by Pastor N. E. Halvorson.

Both congregations operated smoothly during the 1920's, usual activities continued, and financial problems were small. The 10 years marked two changes of note, the full use of the automobile and a change of language. Both are discussed elsewhere in this story.

The 1930's brought us a different picture. Beginning with closing of the local bank in 1931, the community experienced difficult times. St. Paul's receipts plummeted to \$1,252.26 the following year and that was not the bottom. At West Beef River the situation was hardly better financially, their lowest ebb came in 1935 when their treasurer reported receipts of \$1,216, of which \$200 was borrowed money. Younger members of present day may have difficulty grasping the above facts, but many indelible memories of those years remain with those who recall that period. Life within the congregations was very alive at that time and activities were well attended.

#### THE LAST THIRD OF THE CENTURY

The final 20 years existence as separate bodies was an active period for both West Beef River and St. Paul's congregations. The first named constituted one call, St. Paul's and Pleasantville congregations another.

Succeeding Pastor N. E. Halvorson in 1935 was Pastor N. A. Berntson, recent seminary graduate. He served the West Beef River congregation for 10 years and was followed in 1946 by Pastor Arthur Grimstad, who filled the pulpit for some months while a senior student, and after graduation was installed as pastor. Both were young, energetic men, and a definite growth of membership and activity marked those years.

Pastor O. A. Hjemboe tendered his resignation at the annual meeting of St. Paul's congregation in January 1948. He had completed 27 consecutive years of faithful service and agreed to continue for some months until a successor was chosen.

Many new residents had become members of the local church community during and after World War II and some thought had been given to the overall Lutheran ministry in this area. The mania for "untarnished truth" that gripped the Norwegian Synod during the latter part of the previous century had faded with passing of its perpetuators, and participants in initial local differences were long since gone, leaving very few who had any knowledge of basic disputes that caused the parting here.

In view of Pastor Hjemboe's resignation, talks of union became more pronounced and resulted in a meeting of both congregational memberships at St. Paul's on March 1, 1948. The gathering was conducted by the



Rev. Martin Anderson, President of the Eastern District. This had been preceded by several joint council meetings at which a unanimous vote recommending services of the same pastor had been recorded.

Pastor Grimstad of West Beef River, in a letter to his council, indicated intentions of resigning to affect such union, stating "it is difficult for the congregations of Strum to build constructively with a spirit of competition which has existed for 70 years," and "that our sister congregation is of the same synod, built on the same spiritual foundation and exists for the same spiritual purpose." A vote was held with the following results: West Beef River: 101 in favor and only 7 in opposition; St. Paul's: 67 in favor and 111 against a union. The proposal lost.

A call committee had been selected at St. Paul's and together with Pleasantville began searching for a new pastor. Council members realized their past stipend was low and barely exceeded the standard spoken of in Matthew 3:4. Salary was more than doubled, but call letters were promptly returned, and when a near half-dozen vain attempts had been made, the council contacted their counterpart at West Beef River with a request to reopen the March proposal for discussion.

Minutes reveal the latter council met twice, and after considerable discussion and thought, voted against such action. One reason given was the matter of one pastor for the entire four congregation call. The members, no doubt, recalled the March voting and questioned whether St. Paul's members were as favorable to the idea of union as their council.

The Rev. Arthur Olson succeeded Pastor Grimstad in early 1949. St. Paul's call committee continued work and records show the installation of Pastor Axel Blom in late August of that year. Rev. O. A. Hjemboe had continued his service during the interim.

Merger discussion had not died, although no further actions by lay officers are evident in the minutes. The major responsibility for any parish concerns youth and Christian education. The administration of this important work falls on the pastor and a few volunteers. Enlargement of the local public school district took place about this time and at once its varied activities were in competition for the free time of students. The two pastors had easily coordinated their respective youth programs but, as in all small communities, demands on a student's hours were many, and often in conflict with parochial plans.

Pastors Blom and Olson had several private meetings about this and other problems, and to the latter must go a good measure of credit for making a second move which proved successful. His resignation was tendered with a contingency that Pastor Blom be accepted as pastor by the four parishes of the two calls.

#### UNION

A meeting was scheduled for the evening of April 10, 1951. Members met and voted at their respective church buildings. The question considered was not that of merger, but seemed to be an agreement to operate as one parish



with Pastor Blom as their pastor. The vote recorded was: St. Paul's: 183 in favor and 26 negative; West Beef River: 114 in favor and 40 negative. The move carried and Lutherans in our community had taken a long step toward final union.

An inter-parish committee was appointed, a rescheduling of activities took place, and some very careful planning was done. Only the choir and youth groups were merged at the beginning. Sunday morning worship services were held in each building at alternate hours during the summer. The coming of cold weather brought a decision to hold both services in the same building with each congregation dividing time at being hosts. As expected, excellent cooperation was evidenced by all.

In December of 1955, minutes show acknowledgement of Pastor Blom's resignation. Sometime prior to this, Pleasantville and Bruce Valley congregations had aligned themselves with other calls, leaving St. Paul's and West Beef River to be served by one pastor. Discussion regarding dissolution of the two congregations and organization of one came to a head and a meeting was fixed for the evening of March 15, 1956 at St. Paul's.

Several joint council meetings preceded that date and most formalities required by the pending action were thoroughly discussed. No copy of the very important resolution can be found, but a favorable vote of necessary majority was recorded: West Beef River: 80 favorable, 19 against; St. Paul's: 103 favorable, 35 in opposition. Respective officials were charged with dissolution formalities, appointment of a nominating committee and fixing a date for organization.

Harvey M. Berg was called to serve the new parish and was installed September 9, 1956. Merger of auxiliary organizations took place with commendable smoothness and life within the congregations went forward.

Lack of suitable educational facilities had become apparent after the earlier partial union, the two congregations overtaxed available room. Some money had been appropriated and funds donated. Finally in 1958 a decision to construct an educational building was voted. Included were provisions for needed office space, and facilities for serving and dining. The building was dedicated in 1959.

Use of the "White" church building was discontinued in 1959 and the old landmark stood idle throughout the following year. On May 18, 1961 the council accepted a bid for its dismantling. The nearly new pipe organ was moved to the brick building and kitchen furniture was moved to the educational building dining service area.

Pastor Berg was called to serve the National Guard in 1961. Darrel Gilbertson, local student at the seminary, and Larry Hendrickson, also in his last year, divided time in the pulpit until May 1962 when Luther Monson accepted the congregation's call, and is pastor here 10 years later.

The facilities added in 1959 have proved indispensable during these years. Hardly an evening passes but some activity is apparent. The 1971 revised census of members reveals an active number of 1153.



Commemoration of our Centennial year is also marked by a remodeling and addition to our present house of worship. A second access to the balcony was mandatory, a new narthex and additional seating, a needed heating system, new pews, and a general renovation of the interior will be completed in time for the observance.

With this comes an end to a long story. At that, much has been omitted. Translations of all minutes may be completed soon and anyone wishing details regarding any part may obtain desired information.

Throughout these 100 years countless hours by countless people have been cheerfully and willingly given in service to our church. Results of these labors are not always visible to the human eye, nor can they be numbered in a congregation's record. Our distinctly rural community has sent a great population of young people into the world in that time. With each has gone a hope that the impression of the faith gained here would strengthen and keep them as it did their forebearers when they came to this strange land.

#### THIS AND THAT

The steeple at St. Paul's was not constructed until about 1880. Erection of the scaffolding alone requires experienced and reliable carpenters. Cost of the material for the steeple was \$18.50, labor \$12.50.

N. M. Rognlien purchased the larger bell in our present church building. The old bell, from the first West Beef River Church, is in the belfry also.

The name "Immanuel Lutheran" was discussed in 1946 prior to the 75th Anniversary of the West Beef River Church.

When the West Beef River congregation considered moving their building to the village in 1906, option on several lots on the west side of Main Street, across from the village hall, had been secured.

St. Paul's bell was purchased in the late 1870's, weighs 1055 pounds and cost 23¢ per pound. It is presently stored in the parsonage garage.

The 1880 membership at the West Beef River church was listed as 266 souls; St. Paul's had 175 at time of organization in 1877 and no doubt was slightly larger 3 years later, making a grand total of possibly 450. The 1880 population of Unity Township was 465, this included what village existed. There were many members of both congregations living at great distance from their "church."

First worship in the St. Paul's building was held May 18, 1877. The move for dismantling came at a council meeting on May 18, 1961, exactly 84 years later.

Pastor Helsem served St. Paul's, Eleva, Pleasant Valley, Drammen, Pigeon Falls, and Northfield congregations back in the early 1890's. He is credited with having organized four of these, all active today.



## IN RETROSPECT

### LANGUAGE

Changing language was of great consequence among Norwegian Lutheran parishes in this country. Many early pastors maintained that ending use of the mother tongue could terminate the Lutheran faith in this new land. The feeling faded before 1900, though Norse was the only language of at least two professors at the seminary in 1920.

The West Beef River ministerial records give us no information regarding the first English service in that church, although Pastor Folkestad served during the time, and was capable of delivering in that language. First English sermon at St. Paul's was given by Rev. O. M. Kleven, then a senior student at the seminary, on New Years Day 1915.

In 1916 the deacons at St. Paul's recommended that English services be held on Sunday afternoon "when requested." Some 10 years later, time for English was fixed for 9:00 A.M. every Sunday. The change became more pronounced during the early 1930's in both congregations. Pastors Hjemboe and N. E. Halvorson were well versed in the old tongue. A note in St. Paul's records states that Norwegian services continued on the first Sunday of each month until Pastor Hjemboe's resignation in 1949. This may have been feasible because of attendance by the elderly of neighboring parishes. He was the last in a wide area to preach in Norwegian.

However, the change was late in this community. YPS records at St. Paul's for the early 1900's have several urgings to continue the old tongue. Many confirmation candidates had difficulty with instructions but Norse was continued until Rev. Hylland came. A complete language reversal among the youth came over a period of 10 years. A class of 24 in 1924 had one person receiving instructions in English; the 1933 group had all in that language. No indication is given in West Beef River records, but a member recalls "all were English" in 1933.

Minutes of the West Beef River were recorded in Norwegian through 1929. St. Paul's minutes continued in the same language through the annual meeting of 1935, the last of Sivert Rekstad's long tenure as secretary. The deacons report at that church continued in Norse until 1940.

Norwegian may often be overheard on the streets of the village to this day. Visitors from Norway, and there have been several, are surprised at the number of people able to converse fluently in their tongue. This ability is fast passing, and only a very few may remain in another decade. A May 17th (Norwegian Independence Day) program is held each year at the church, with speakers and singing in Norwegian, lunch with old country pastries, etc. It is very popular and attended by visitors from great distances.

### THE BYGDE-LAGS

As the early pioneers grew older and life's burden lessened, it is reasonable to believe thoughts and memories turned to days of their youth, place



of birth, and relatives left in the old country. Practically none of the first-comers returned for a visit, although most had the means and time. Possibly a reason for this particular inaction was the growing popularity of the "bygde-lage" (district reunions), a reunion of immigrants from a particular area, valley, or settlement of Norway.

Gudbrandsdal, Toten, Mjøsa, Voss, etc., all had their individual organizations and annual gatherings. The Lutheran Church did not sponsor these events as a synod, but pastors, who for the most part were natives themselves, and auxiliary committees of the congregations, handled the many details of such meetings, usually held in a large church.

Østerdal, wherein Tolga is located, is a long and well-populated valley from which about 40,000 had emigrated. Their "lag" (reunion) organized in 1910, met in the larger cities because of the great membership. Minneapolis, Fargo, Eau Claire (1917), etc., held the Østerdal conventions and many of the local "tollings" attended, some every year if possible. Here was an opportunity to meet acquaintances after absences of 40 to 50 years and to have contact with newcomers from the exact home area, possibly with a word of close relatives. One can imagine the appeal and attraction of these occasions for the elderly.

St. Paul's church was the scene of the annual Hurdal "lag" in June of 1921. Hurdal, a tiny area in comparison with Østerdal, usually held their meetings in smaller cities and villages. Strum was probably the least populated of all these.

Report of the event, carried by "The Reform" of Eau Claire, tells of visitors from both Dakotas, Minnesota, Iowa, besides many from the home state. Music by a ladies band, choirs, instrumental and vocal duets and solos, speeches, and visiting filled the three days. Special compliments were paid the Ladies Aid for authentic Norwegian dishes served at dinners and a banquet.

As long distance travel by auto was not yet practical, most visitors came by rail, to be met at the stations in Eau Claire and Independence. In any event the three-day affair was well handled and a success in every way. The personal reunions were many. Undoubtedly these "lags" filled a decided void in the lives of these elderly men and women.

#### LAYMAN ACTIVITIES

Layman activity, except to collect money and teach parochial class, was a delicate subject during the first half of congregational existence here. As many local settlers came from areas where Hauge's preaching and teaching had made deep impressions, it was not unlikely that more individual expression and latitude of thought was felt possible. The United Church (St. Paul's) was considered more liberal in many matters than the Norwegian Synod, but regarding the matter of layman participation, there was little difference. Preaching by persons other than ordained clergy was generally allowed only in the Hauge Synod.



Following what little noticeable local agitation was apparent during the synod upheaval in the late 1880's, came a free church movement in our community. While inroads among local Lutherans were not great, some very sincere thinking members had questions about policies and practices of the church.

Among these was Hans Willumson, local pioneer merchant and member of the St. Paul's School Commission. He was a highly-respected, well-liked man and for good reasons. During long winter months, while fathers were off in northern pinneries, he had kept many families with needed supplies. His team was always ready in event of emergencies and few were the calls to which he failed to respond. Families were heard in later years referring to him as an angel with a long beard.

Minutes of St. Paul's for 1900 make note of his request to engage in layman preaching and of the deacons request to have a written statement as to his beliefs and God's Word. His statement was filed at the annual meeting and request granted with a reservation: "limited to Lutherans only." In 1902 we find a very eloquent letter explaining his wish to withdraw from the congregation because of its policy and practice. The attention given the communications in both instances reveals a consideration for his sincerity and one has a feeling the ultra-rigid stand of that time did not have whole-hearted support.

#### COOPERATION

In spite of what we could believe, cooperation between the two local congregations seemed reasonably good when one considers they were in a sense competitive. In January of 1884 there is found in West Beef River records a suggestion that a union with St. Paul's be attempted. In 1902 the minutes of the latter authorized an expression of thanks to be extended the West Beef River for use of their church building while remodeling was going on. In 1912 the West Beef River passed a resolution urging the pastors to exchange pulpits and members to work in harmony regarding church matters, later each congregation appointed a committee of five men to further such work.

With the coming of Pastors Preus and Hjemboe in 1920, fringe activities were steadily coordinated. The two men substituted for each other on several occasions without notice or comment.

Both congregations entered protests to the proposal of dropping the word "Norwegian" from the church title when it came up in 1928, and again 10 years later, in 1938.

#### SOCIETIES AND LODGES

Apart from either congregation, but with members from both, was the very active Temperance Society, organized in the mid-1880's. "The Reform," a Norwegian weekly published in Eau Claire, had wide circulation among residents of this area and was a vigorous supporter of the movement. This was undoubtedly a reason the community remained "dry" until repeal of the 18th Amendment. The present small Temperance Hall had been constructed the



first years and regular monthly meetings with speakers, music, etc., continued until about 1905. Needless to say, the body had the support of pastors from both congregations, it being an "open" society.

All Lutheran church bodies opposed lodges and secret societies. Membership in such organizations was cause for refusal of Sacraments of the church and other facilities provided by the congregation. The extreme of this position is revealed in a story connected with a faint marginal note in the St. Paul's burial register for the year 1906.

The incident concerns the burial of a 2-month-old baby girl whose interment had been refused in the home cemetery. The note reads "refused burial at ..... because father belonged to a secret society." The latter came to St. Paul's officials as they were more liberal in some matters. His offense: purchase of an insurance policy from the Modern Woodman Insurance Society.

#### A BELATED INSERT

An interesting paragraph was overlooked in assembling this story. Pastor M. Flekke, Paul Moltzau, Anton Rognlien, Nels Robbe and Secretary Even Holte were nominated as building committee for our present church structure in 1915. Pastor Flekke did an excellent job on solicitations, Mr. Moltzau resigned and the remaining members had charge of the building detail.

Plans provided for an adequate belfry but did not include a steeple. Neither the architect or the committee favored this addition and construction was finished accordingly. A parishioner was much aroused about this omission, raised such a fuss about a "church without a steeple", the committee ordered the erection at an additional cost of \$500.00. As so often happens, the voluble member contributed nothing. -- Except fuss.



The auto was replacing the horse - - St. Pauls - 1915

## ALTAR GUILD

This society was organized in 1950 by Pastor Blom to take care of the changing of Altar cloths according to the season. The society also keeps candles on the Altar, cares for the communion elements, cleansing and storing them following communion. It also provides a baptismal towel, made by Juline Gullicksrud and Mabel Olson, for each child baptized. Flowers on the Altar have also been the responsibility of the society.

The membership of 18 women has for its officers for 1972:

Mrs. Marshall Anderson, President  
Mrs. Stanley Moltzau, Vice President  
Mrs. Allerd Skovbrotten, Sr., Treasurer  
Mrs. Frank Pabst, Secretary

## MISSION SOCIETY

The Mission Society of St. Paul's was organized from a defunct Young Women's Club in 1926. Both men and women could be members. Its programs were mainly mission studies. The purpose of the society is to support various missions.

In 1957 the society was reorganized with West Beef River congregation. By this time men had dropped from the membership.

Meetings are held twice a month with Bible Study, book reviews, and devotions. During the year many articles are made by the members which are sold at their annual bazaar in the fall. Receipts from the bazaar in 1971 were \$506.00.

Every year the society sponsors the 17th of May Festival (Norwegian Independence Day). The program is given in Norwegian and the menu is made up of Norwegian delicacies such as Flødegrød, lefse, kjød rul, söt suppe, sandbakkels, krumkake, berline kranser.

A very substantial missionary effort is carried out by this small society of about 43 members. In 1962 support of a Korean child was undertaken. In 1971 the society realized an income of \$1,226.68, most of which went to missions such as:

Norwegian Seaman Church, N.Y.	Seattle Seamens Center
Norwegian Seamens Church San Francisco	Lutheran World Relief
Lutheran Campus Ministry	Bible Institute
Compassion (Orphan support and clothing)	Ministry to Jewish People
Leprosy Mission	Plymouth Youth Center
Billy Graham	Lutheran Social Services
New Hope Center	Latin American Lutheran Mission
Lutheran Literature Society for China	Others



Officers for 1972 are:

Mrs. Ingvald Myhers, President  
Mrs. Anna Eide, Vice President  
Mrs. Palmer Eide, Secretary-Treasurer

#### ST. PAUL'S LUTHER LEAGUE

On November 17, 1892, a meeting was held at the parsonage of C. J. Helsem to organize a Young Peoples Society. The first officers were: C. J. Helsem, President; Hans Willumson, Vice President; Daniel Moltzau, Secretary; and Louise Helsem, Treasurer.

A committee drafted the constitution which states that the special purpose of the society was to awaken and nourish the spiritual life of the youth, interest them in the good things of life in order to develop a Christian character, and encourage each other in God's work. All members must be baptized, confirmed, and members of a Lutheran church.

Meetings were held every 3 weeks, mainly in the homes in the summer, and were attended by a large part of the congregation. At each meeting an individual was chosen as editor of "Palmegrenen". These editorials were read at the next meeting. The articles were on anything from the founding of Lutheranism, temperance, Judaism versus Christianity, to poems and articles in a lighter vein.

J. P. Hanson wrote the first number in 1896. Thirty-two years later he wrote one of the last articles and many in between. The first numbers were in Norwegian. The last entry was March 3, 1929. Some protest was made that there were too many English programs. The society also sponsored the Christmas programs of the church. Many contributions to the welfare of the congregation were made. A piano was bought from Fred Lyons for \$300 in 1914, and the society paid for a fence around the church yard. It paid for altar, font, and pulpit in 1902 when the church was enlarged. The society also bought a Kilgen Pipe Organ, and in 1936 financed glass windows and electric lights.

An especially interesting project was carried out by the society in its sponsorship of a Malagasy slave boy. This boy was bought by Missionary G. N. Isolony in the slave market when he was 2 or 3 years old. He did not know when he was born or where, but it was probably about 1873 in the western part of Madagascar. He was given the name of Andreas Knutson and raised in the Whalen home. A teacher by the name of Knutson in Norway supported him for a time. In 1894 St. Paul's Luther League voted to sponsor him. At that time he took the name Andreas Strum. They supported him until he died at the age of 46. He was sent to France in 1900 for a year to study French. He became proficient in Norse, French, and English. He was ordained into the ministry in 1901 and spent some time in St. Augustine. In 1904 he was sent to Fort Dauphin where he was pastor and teacher in a boys school, and the last 9 years of his life as teacher at the seminary.

Pastor Strum was a quiet, gentle person who did a great work in his Christian witness among his people. He married Estera in 1898 who was also raised in



the Whalen home. Seven children were born to them, two girls and five boys. The Luther League voted to support one of the boys, Marshall Strum, February 25, 1923.

#### WEST BEEF RIVER LUTHER LEAGUE

The West Beef River Luther League was organized April 5, 1894 at the home of Mrs. Oline Dahl. The first officers were: Otto Dahl, President; Ole B. Moe, Vice President; Lars Moe, Secretary; and N. M. Rognlien, Treasurer.

Meetings were held in the homes and at times in the Temperance Hall in Strum, every 3 weeks. Ladies were asked to bring the lunch.

In May 1895 the League donated an organ to the congregation and bought blinds for the church, and helped with various expenses.

The constitution was rewritten in 1900 by a committee of three, namely Pastor Toft, John L. Dahl, and Daniel Moltzau. The League's purpose was to help support the congregation spiritually and materially. All confirmed members of the congregation were members. Meetings were to be held regularly with programs consisting of singing, readings, declamations, and sometimes debates. The constitution stated that if any member behaved in an unseemly fashion, he shall be reprimanded, and if he would not mend his ways, be excluded from the organization. He could be reinstated upon acknowledgement of his sin and his promise to reform.

The annual Christmas Tree Festival was always the responsibility of the League. The programs were in Norwegian but early as 1904 a resolution was passed to have some programs in English. One innovation was an entire program of selections on Joseph Bergseth's Victrola.

Ice cream socials also were held to help out with finances. One was held in Rognlien's Grove, July 4, 1910, which evidently was well attended. This picnic place was easily accessible from the road going to the Joe Rice place.

The League bought the present pipe organ in 1918 and also furnished hymnaries and helped with other expenses.

One of the highlights in later years was the 3-day convention of the Luther League in the Mondovi Conference. Much preparation was required of the host congregation involving everybody, not the least was putting up the big tent for the overflow attendance. St. Paul's and West Beef River were hosts to the convention at various times.

During Pastor Blom's pastorate, about 1951, the League became strictly a youth league made up of members of high school age. The officers for 1972 are:

Eric Hagen, President  
Mark Gullicksrud, Vice President  
Martha Monson, Secretary-Treasurer



A Junior League, made up of members of the confirmation classes, was begun in 1969.

Many activities are engaged in by the members, such as swimming parties, hay rides, weiner roasts, etc. After games at the high school, get-togethers for the youth are held in the Parish Hall basement.

#### WEST BEEF RIVER LADIES AID

The Ladies Aid of West Beef River was organized by Rev. Heyer at a meeting in the parsonage sometime between 1882 and 1885. The five districts were namely the Frodahl, Borreson, Lunde, Strum, and Big Creek districts. In this way no one lived so far but what they could get to the meetings in the homes, even if they had to walk.

One can imagine the hustle and bustle in the days preceeding the meeting for the hostess. The house had to be cleaned, especially the front room (if she had a house big enough for one). Usually that front room had the shades drawn and no one of the family could go in there. It was only for company. The lace curtains must be washed and stretched and everything made spic and span. Homemade bread and meat was prepared, probably even rømmegröd; doughnuts, cookies, and other delicacies made ready.

The attendance was not large and times being hard, not too much was realized in the offering. The offering of each one was carefully noted: 10 cents being the usual amount from the ladies, 25 cents from the men present, and 5 cents from the children. Also careful record was kept of the articles the women brought for their bazaar. Aprons, pillowcases, handkerchiefs, towels, pin cushions, tobacco pouches, blouses, and, in one instance, two cats. In the Norwegian the entry says 2 "katter". How these women had time and energy to make all these articles, since most of them must have been made by hand, is remarkable. Cloth wasn't too expensive, but with the few eggs they had to sell, bringing about 6 cents a dozen, and large families that needed food and clothing, finding a few yards of cloth for their gifts must have been a hardship for some.

The "kvindeforenings fest" was a gala day for the whole family. It was usually held in June. There were buildings for cooking coffee and serving pop, lemonade, and ice cream, and a covered shelter for tables on the knoll west of the old church site. Here lunch was served and homemade ice cream made with real cream and egg custard was sold. In the afternoon an auction of all the articles made during the year was held. Martin Myhers remembers serving as auctioneer some years.

The Treasurer's book of 1907 shows a total income of \$627.75, with expenses of \$25.63.

Sometimes meetings were held in the M.W.A. Hall. In 1909 the Aid held an ice cream social in Rognlien's Grove. The 17th of May 1910, a rømmegröd supper was to be held in M.W.A. Hall. Entries show expenses and receipts but no figures and no explanation of what happened.



Though offerings were small, it seemed that the Ladies Aid was often called on to help the congregation with expenses. In 1905 they paid \$70 for a church lot. 1906 recording this deed \$0.60.

The church district paid \$100 toward the parsonage in 1909.

In 1921, when transportation became easier, the districts were combined into the South Branch and Strum districts. When a mission fest or other event occurred, these combined to serve as one.

On February 3, 1927 the two districts merged into one and all meetings were held in the church basement. Until 1930 Norwegian was used at all meetings.

The Aid donated to missions and shared in the building of the parsonage in 1924. Many improvements in the kitchen and other upkeep of church property have been financed by the Aid. In 1941 the Aid widened its scope, taking an active part in the Women's Missionary Federation. Christian Nurture programs, Life Membership, and Cradle Roll programs were carried out during the year. A history of the Aid was also kept by a Historian.

#### ST. PAUL'S LADIES AID

Even while St. Paul's Church was being built in 1877, women of the congregation were doing their bit. Several of them volunteered to bring the noon meal to the men working at the church. Each took their turn bringing the food; some walking as far as 3 miles. Dried beef, bread and butter, pork, cheese, lefse, and some even brought rømmegrød. Bringing their good food with a smile, despite their long walk in the heat, and serving it in the traditional Norwegian way, apologizing for it -- that good, nourishing food for hungry men.

Sometime after 1878 Pastor Helsem organized a Ladies Aid Society for the extension of the Kingdom and to lend a hand financially and spiritually to the congregation. In his parochial reports he frequently commends the ladies for their faithful service. The Aid consisted of three districts: North Side, South Side and Lower Big Creek.

In the congregational report of 1883 the Aid had an expenditure of \$201.81 for the church, part of which was for the Altar painting and freight costing \$61.25. The Aid bought an organ for the church in 1889.

During the remodeling of the church in 1902, the Aid asked to have a basement built. This was voted in, providing the Aid paid the cost themselves, which they did.

In 1929, due to better means of transportation, the divisions were dropped and all meetings were held in church. There were 12 groups of 12 members each serving once a year. Later they held two meetings a month with one-half of a group serving. All meetings were conducted in Norwegian until 1930. An interesting fact in St. Paul's was that on many occasions there were men giving devotions. Ole Halverson, Knut Hammer, and O. P. Berg often took part in this manner.



Some of the Aid's projects were:

- 1921 - Paid cost of interior decorating and carpeting
- 1935 - Remodeled kitchen and painted basement
- 1949 - Gave \$1,000 to remodeling of parsonage
- 1950 - Donated altar cloths, pulpit pendants, and stoles

They joined the Women's Missionary Federation and began the use of mission boxes.

#### UNION

In 1954 St. Paul's began to hold meetings with the West Beef River Ladies Aid. The Aids were combined in 1956, the first meeting as Strum Lutheran Ladies Aid was held April 11, 1956. Meetings were held alternately in the two churches.

Now there was one large Aid of nearly 300 members. The newly-elected officers were:

President, Mrs. Maurice Hanson  
First Vice President, Mrs. Leonard Bolling  
Second Vice President, Mrs. Carl Berg  
Secretary, Mrs. Porter Kunes  
Assistant Secretary, Mrs. Chester Olson  
Treasurer, Mrs. Willard Rippenburg  
Assistant Treasurer, Mrs. Laurie Halverson

On April 8, 1959 a revolutionary idea was incorporated into the Aid. This was to organize the Aid into small groups or circles which would meet in the homes for Bible Study, fellowship, and prayer, much as the early Aids did. These circles are headed by a Chairman and all are rearranged every 2 years. The Bible Study is guided by the ALCW publication "Scope", and a leaders meeting (begun in 1962), conducted by Pastor Monson, gives an excellent insight into the subjects being studied. Spiritually, this has been a great blessing to those who participate.

At present the Aid, now known as Strum ALCW, meets once a month, and circles also meet once a month. One project of the circles is visitation at the Nursing Home at least once a year, bringing lunch and entertainment to the residents.

There are 16 circles with about 20 members in each, including Honorary members, and 23 serving groups of 12 or 13 members each. Total membership of active and Honorary members is 336.

Every month a birthday table for the birthdays of that month is set. Proceeds from this table go to a special project.

Many projects are carried out during the year by the Stewardship Department. Last year they sent Bible pictures and marked Testaments to India, saved stamps for Bethel Mission in Germany, saved labels and wrappers for Northern Colony, sent 67 Klenli-Kits and 30 Activiti-Kits to Lutheran World Relief,

donated \$127.00 for Bibles for Nigeria, and made 273 quilts for Lutheran World Relief, plus donated used clothing and homemade soap.

The ALCW sends one-half of its offering to the ALC budget. Every year, third graders are given Bibles. A Sunshine Christmas Party for senior citizens has been given each year. This year a mitten tree decorated the dining hall at the party, with mittens for needy children in the county.

Donations by the ALCW every year are to:

- Servicemen gifts
- American Bible Society
- LEAF
- Luther Park Bible Camp
- Lutheran Campus Ministry
- Lutheran Social Services
- Plymouth Youth Center
- American Lutheran Homes
- Lincoln Boys School
- Martin Luther Home

Serving at auctions, funerals, and banquets are means of helping with finances.

The officers for 1972 are:

- Mrs. Dean Boehne, President
- Mrs. Palmer Indrebo, Vice President
- Mrs. Howard Hanson, Secretary
- Mrs. Walter Brion, Treasurer
- Mrs. Joyce Gullicksrud, Secretary of Education
- Mrs. Leonard Bolling, Secretary of Stewardship

These officers attend a workshop in the Conference in the fall. Then, before the end of the year, they meet with Mrs. Luther Monson and plan the projects and programs for the following year. These are printed and assembled in a yearbook which is mailed to each member, together with other pertinent material. Each spring these officers and elected delegates attend a convention somewhere in the Conference.

#### CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

From the beginning, much concern for the Christian education of the children was evident in St. Paul's. A school commission of five men was elected at each annual meeting. Parochial, actually Norwegian religious, school was held in the various school districts, Johnson Valley, Upper and Lower Big Creek, Strum, and Melling districts.

Frederick Raney was hired as teacher and went from district to district, teaching in some districts up to 6 weeks. The pay was small. At one time he asked a bushel of wheat from each family as his pay, rather than money. With up to 35 pupils enrolled at a time, he asked that parents teach the ABC's at home so he could have more time with the older pupils.



As the sessions of public school became longer, less time for Norwegian school became available. Then it became necessary to have religious school a month during the summer vacation. One man in each of the districts who was on the school commission was responsible for collecting money from the parents to pay the teacher, and sometimes board for that teacher when necessary. Teachers were local people, sometimes students from church colleges and academies.

In 1899 the following teachers for the Strum district were: O. M. Solberg, J. J. Dahl, O. S. Johnson, Mrs. Helsem; in Johnson Valley: S. Rekstad, Ole P. Berg, Hans Willumson; Lower Big Creek: Fred Ranes, O. Indgjer, and O. Engen; Melling district: Mollie and Christine Romundstad.

Daniel Moltzau taught in the Hillside district at one time. Children from the West Beef River congregation and Bruce Valley also attended in these districts.

Sunday School was started around 1882 with Esten Johnson, Mrs. Helsem, and Sivert Rekstad as teachers. Another Sunday School was added in Johnson Valley with Sivert Rekstad as superintendent, Ole Halverson, Erik Erlien, and Knut Hammer as teachers. Sivert Rekstad was superintendent in the church district until 1925 when Ole Halverson took his place.

Some of the later teachers in the Parochial schools were Astrid and Olive Romundstad, Ruth Eide, Ida Hopland, and many others.

Pastor Hjemboe and Pastor Preus set up a system to serve both churches in Strum. As transportation became better, more and more children were brought to the Sunday School in church and by 1926 districts were discontinued. Many faithful teachers served through the years; Mrs. Thea Kleven, Mrs. William Kromroy, Mr. and Mrs. Arup Nelson, to name a few.

One year, when there was no vacation church school in Strum, Mrs. Mabel Hulberg had school in her own home for her small children and invited other children who wished to attend. She had 30 students in all.

Confirmation instruction was given from the beginning in West Beef River congregation by the pastors. Some meetings were held in the Temperance Hall in Strum. In the early years all instruction was in the Norwegian language in catechism, explanation (question and answers), and Bible history. Imagine the difficulty some children must have had learning the old Norwegian alphabet which is so different from the English (especially in homes where the parents didn't read too much Norse). In the 1930's, English became the only language used.

Confirmation Day in the early days was a day to be looked forward to and dreaded, too, by many. A hot day in late June usually was the day. Children who probably had been barefoot since the last snow melted, had to don new shoes that usually pinched. Girls in their new dresses and boys with their first long trousers (a sign that they were grown up) were lined up in a double row down the aisle of church. Catechization came first, a thorough drilling by the pastor that sometimes took hours. In one instance the confirmation day began at 11:00 A.M. and ended at 4:00 P.M. Several

children fainted. This particular class had been a bit hard for the pastor to handle, but he had his innings on Confirmation Day.

The beginning of Sunday School in West Beef River is uncertain, but pastors, with the help of many faithful teachers, carried out a program of Christian education.

In the school years of 1962-63 and 1963-64, Saturday School was held in place of Sunday School. Each teacher taught one subject such as Bible Study, Missions, and Catechism.

At present, Sunday School classes and some Saturday classes are held to correspond with with public school year. Every year Vacation Bible School is held 2 weeks in the summer.

A Board of Education of six members, elected for 3-year terms, plans and carries out the education program, together with the pastor. The members of the Board of Education are: Mrs. Mabel Hulberg, Chairman; Mrs. Bjarne Finstad, Mrs. David Kiepert, Mrs. Esther Larson, Mrs. Perry Berg, and Mrs. Werner Rice.

The Sunday School has an enrollment of 300 pupils, taught by a staff of 24 teachers. These classes range from 4-year olds through the 12th grade. A 4-year Bible Department was added in St. Paul's in 1949, which was continued after the churches joined. Thus students can attend Sunday School through their high school years with a graduation in their senior year.

Confirmation instruction is given in 8th and 9th grades with confirmation in the fall of their 10th grade year. The classes meet in two sessions on Saturday with Pastor Monson. Adult confirmation instruction is given for those who desire it, by the pastor.

A number of adult discussion groups have been active the past year. Once a month, a men's Bible Study group meets between services, also led by the pastor.

#### MUSIC

The singing of hymns in praise of the Lord has always been a part of the Lutheran Church. No less interest was shown by our early church. Both West Beef River and St. Paul's had a "klokker" in the early days. One of his duties was to lead the hymn singing. Frederick Raner served in that capacity for many years in St. Paul's and Lars Moe in West Beef River.

Even Evenson organized a choir in St. Paul's and was also their first organist. In 1890 a liturgy from Norway was adopted to be used in the church. A number of choir directors directed over the years; among them Louise Helsem, Fred Raner, E. N. Kleven, Ovid Berg, and others.

Mrs. C. J. Helsem and Fred Raner were organists until the pipe organ was installed. Christophine Rekstad, Marie Rekstad, Dr. Roloffson, Laura Olson, Clara Rekstad, and Mathilda Berg served over the years as organists. Mathilda Berg served from 1923 to 1943. Later Mrs. Joseph Gilbertson, Richard Matson, and Mrs. Blom were organists.



West Beef River had an active choir for many years. Ole and Lars Moe were much interested in the singing in church. They had had musical training in Norway. Malvin Dahl was organist at one time and was largely self-taught. In the old Luther League records there are references to a "Normanaker", probably a Men's Chorus. Bertha Borreson, Olga Holte, Julia Olson, and Mrs. John Myhers also were organists.

For the 50th Anniversary a Cantata written by Pastor Sigurd Folkestad was sung by the choir, under the leadership of Professor Dahle from Concordia, who also composed the music.

Pastor and Mrs. Preus did much work with the choir, she as soloist and organist, and he as soloist and director. Mrs. N. E. Halverson, Pastor Berntson, Helen Robbe, and Lawrence Butek directed in later years.

Many other fine organists have added much to our Sunday morning worship, namely Helen Robbe, Mrs. Ted Halverson for a period of 18 years, Nancy Rice, Jean Westegaard, Mrs. Luther Monson, and Fran Skoug.

Mrs. Carla Nymo had been choir director for nearly 10 years until the past year. Mrs. Luther Monson now directs a senior choir of about 31 members, a junior choir, and a children's choir.

In the years past, for our Luther League conventions, the choirs in the Mondovi Conference would have a Choral Union. Sunday afternoon of the convention would be given over to this choir. It was quite a thrill to go to the many practices and take part in the final effort on Sunday afternoon in a strange community and sing under the leadership of E. N. Kleven, Ovid Berg, or Hilman Amundson. This practice has been somewhat revived in the last few years as a massed choir from the Mondovi Conference has had concerts at Whitehall, Osseo, and Eleva-Strum High School during Advent. Members of our choir have participated.

#### WEST BEEF RIVER YOUNG WOMEN'S CLUB

A quite active Young Women's Club was started in 1917 by Mrs. Sigurd Folkestad. This society's aim was mission work and aiding the congregation. Meetings were held every 3 weeks, either in the homes or church parlors. The programs consisted of singing, readings, and devotions.

Every fall the society sponsored a Lutefisk Supper. During the year many beautiful articles were made by the members for their annual bazaar. This society was disbanded during Pastor Grimstad's pastorate.

#### SUNSHINE CLUB

A Sunshine Club for young girls ages 9 to 14 was active under the leadership of Mrs. Preus. This was a sewing club which served as a beginners club until confirmation, when the members became eligible for Young Women's Club.

#### L.D.R.

Mrs. Arthur Olson organized the L.D.R. (Lutheran Daughters of the Reformation), a society whose main object was mission work. This society is no longer in existence.

#### 79'ERS CLUB

This club had its inception at Grace Lutheran, Pleasantville, which also included St. Paul's young married couples, October 31, 1949, for the purpose of Bible Study and entertainment. Pastor Blom led the Bible Study. Proceeds from bake sales, ice cream and pie socials, and regular meetings were used for the support of Missionary Johan Mkize in South Africa. After joining of the churches, West Beef River was included. On January 6, 1957, the name was changed to Couples Club. They also sponsored movies such as the Martin Luther film and made contributions to children's homes. This club was disbanded in 1964.



Inskomm. Restancer for det første Aar  
 Pastor Therven til Kirke - fra Høsten 1871 til Høsten 1872

Indbetalt til E. Evenson i Løbet af første Aar		Insk.	Udbetalt
71-72	(Udlignet \$1.62 paa Hver)		
	Ole Linn	1 50	
	Johan Tyverson	1 62	
	Johannes Rise	1 00	
	Edward Rise	2 00	
	Paul Christoffersen	2 00	
	Ole Brøndingen	2 10	
	Andreas Arneson	2 00	
	Ellands Anderson	1 50	
	Christian Anderson	1 00	
	Esten Johnson	2 10	
	Nils Kløven	1 25	
	Martin Evenson	1 00	
	E. Evenson	2 00	
	Jacob Olsen	1 00	
	H. J. Roglien	1 62	
	Simon Rise	1 60	
	Ole Johnson	1 50	
	Anton Dahl	25	
	Indbetalt til Pastor Therven		26 84
		26 84	26 84

1874

AN OLD BOOK

Page 3 of the very first treasurer's book has some interesting information.

Pastor Lars Sherven finished Concordia Seminary at St. Louis in early summer of 1871 and was working in this area shortly afterward. Lutherans in this community contributed a sum of \$26.84 for his services for that first year, which began in the fall of 1871.

The neat record was the work of Hansjörn Rognlien who lived on the now Nordahl Gullicksrud farm (NE NE Section 8). He was a nephew of the three brothers mentioned in the story. Well educated for those times, he was elected the first Secretary, klokker, and parochial teacher. Rognlien passed away in 1874, a young man.

The entry shows names of 18 settlers, at least ten of these have descendants in this area today. Translation follows.

-----  
Incoming receipts for the first year Pastor Sherven served

- from the fall of 1871 to the fall --

Paid to E. Evenson during the first year

1871-72 (apportioned \$1.62 on each)	income	pd out
--------------------------------------	--------	--------

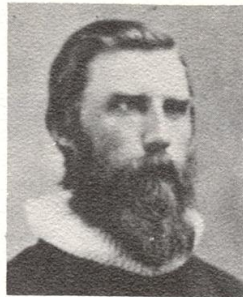
-----  
-----  
Paid in to Pastor Sherven \$26.84  
-----



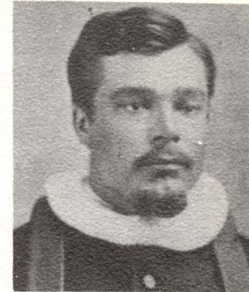
LUTHERAN PASTORS WHO HAVE SERVED -



*Ole Waldeland*  
1869-?



*Erik Jensen*  
1870-?



*Lars Sherven*  
1871-1874



*Fredrik Møller*  
1874-1877



*I. L. P. Dietrichsen*  
1877-1879



*H. F. Haakenson*  
1879-1882



*Halvor E. Heyer*  
1882-1889



*Peder Toft*  
1899-1908



*D. Kvaase*  
1908-1909



*Sigurd Folkestad*  
1909-1920



*Matias Flekke*  
1915



*J. H. Preus*  
1920-1930



THIS AREA AND OUR CONGREGATIONS



*N. E. Halvorson  
1930-1935*



*N. A. Berntson  
1935-1945*



*Arthur Grimstad  
1946-1949*



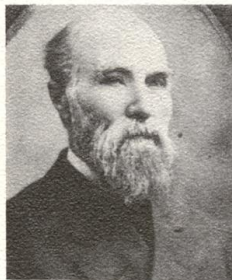
*Arthur Olson  
1949-1951*



*Axel T. Blom  
Served WBR 1951-55*



*Gjermund Hoyme  
1877-1879*



*C. J. Helsem  
1879-1914*



*O. J. Hylland  
1914-1920*



*O. A. Hjemboe  
1920-1949*



*Axel T. Blom  
1940-1955*



*Harvey M. Berg  
1956-1961*



*Luther Monson  
1962-*



SONS OF THE CONGREGATIONS

Pictured are those from this congregation who are serving or who have served The American Lutheran Church or her antecedent synods.



*Arup Helsem  
Ordained 1912*



*Joseph Rognlien  
Ordained 1912*



*Ole Kleven  
Ordained 1915*



*Alf Hjemboe  
Ordained 1945*



*Darrel Gilbertson  
Ordained 1964*



*Richard Matson  
Ordained 1964*

*Stephan Olson*

*A student, is presently serving internship in New Guinea.*

*Eileen Butek*

*Served two years as a missionary nurse in Pakistan.*

*Peter Andreas Strum*

*A native of Madagascar. An ordained Lutheran minister whose education was financed by the St. Pauls YPS.*



LEADERS OF THEIR TIMES



*Lars J. Dahl  
As early secretary  
he recopied first minutes*



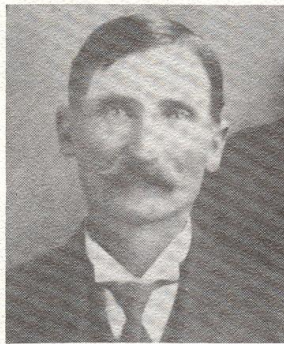
*Anton Rognlien  
"In Jesus Name let  
us build a church"-1915*



*Mrs. Mabel Hulberg  
Sunday school teacher  
and present superintendent*



*Gerald Bergerson  
Chosen President at  
the merger - 1956*



*Lars B. Moe  
WBR Precentor  
for 35 years*



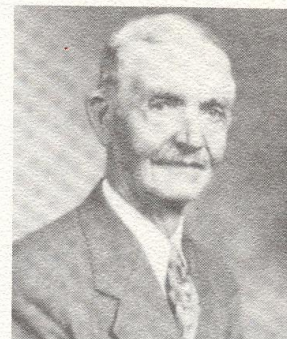
*Harold Brian  
President  
1972*



*Olaus Dahl  
Trustee, Deacon, and  
long-time Secretary*

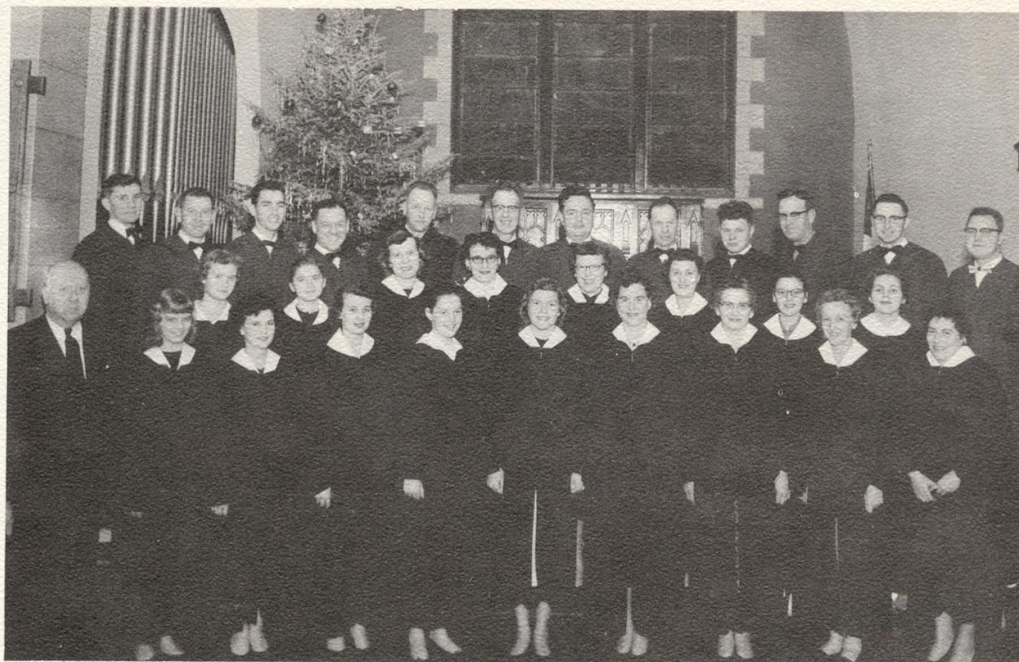


*Fred Ranes  
Early song leader,  
organist, and  
parochial teacher*



*Even Holte  
Long Time Secretary  
WBR*





WE HAVE HAD CHOIRS FOR OVER 80 Years



AIDS HAVE BEEN ACTIVE FOR OVER 90 YEARS